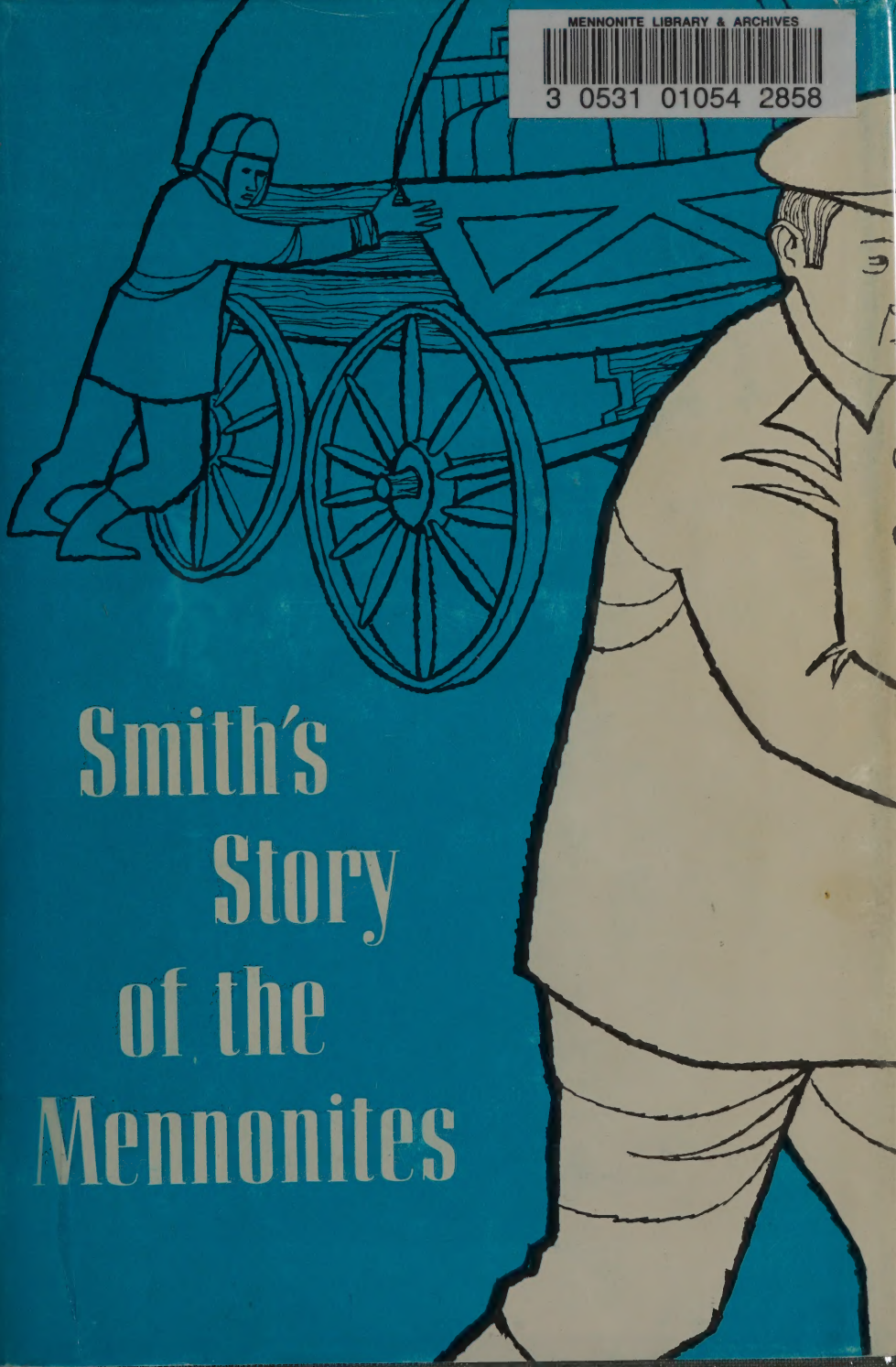


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# The Story of The MENNONITES

## The Story of the Mennonites

by  
C. HENRY SMITH

UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

CHICAGO, ILL.

1913

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CHICAGO, ILL.





# The Story of The MENNONITES

by  
C. HENRY SMITH

Fourth Edition  
Revised and Enlarged  
by  
CORNELIUS KRAHN

MENNONITE PUBLICATION OFFICE  
Newton, Kansas

1957

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## PREFACE

*The Story of the Mennonites*, by C. Henry Smith, was first published in 1920, under the title *The Mennonites*. It was the author's second major book. In 1941, after numerous other books by Smith, *The Mennonites* appeared in an entirely revised and enlarged version under the title *The Story of the Mennonites*. Of this second edition a slightly revised reprint was made in 1945. The great changes which had taken place during World War II were not taken into account.

Repeatedly C. Henry Smith suggested to the writer of this preface that he undertake the task of relating the story of the Mennonites during and after World War II as an additional chapter, to bring the book up to date. Before Smith died he again repeated his request and the General Conference Mennonite Board of Publication was informed about this in a letter which he wrote the day before he died, October 18, 1948.

Since the reprint of 1945 was nearly exhausted, the Board of Publication and the writer began to plan a new and revised edition of *The Story of the Mennonites*. The following became clear: Although definite changes and additions were necessary, it was agreed that this was to be done in the spirit of the author and that the book in general should remain that of the author, C. Henry Smith. It was, above all, the aim to bring up to date each chapter dealing with the developments at the time when World War II started and the book was printed. Although these developments had affected the Mennonites of Europe most, the Mennonite settlements of North and South America had also undergone great changes. One needs only to be reminded of the gigantic accomplishments "in the Name of Christ," through the channels of the Mennonite Central Committee. This revision was

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to be made without greatly increasing the size of the book. For this reason some chapters were reduced by rewriting parts of the same. A few other changes and numerous corrections were made, an index, a bibliography, and illustrations were added. The latter were mostly from the pages of MENNONITE LIFE. Thus, *The Story of the Mennonites* now appears as the third, revised edition.

The task of eliminating mistakes and bringing up to date a book which covers more than four hundred years of the history of the Mennonites in all countries was made possible through the very generous attitude of the Board of Publication and the administration of Bethel College for releasing the writer from other duties for this purpose. The help of John F. Schmidt, especially in matters pertaining to style, punctuation, and proof-reading, is gratefully acknowledged. In style and punctuation the aim was to be consistent. Among those having made helpful suggestions it is our privilege to mention Melvin Gingerich, Ernst Crous, Kurt Kauenhoven, and G. Reimer.

May the new revised edition be an aid to all members of the Mennonite family in strengthening each one's convictions and faith in Jesus Christ. May it challenge all to consistent Christian living in harmony with the best of our heritage.

Cornelius Krahn

Bethel College

North Newton, Kansas, August, 1950

## FROM THE FOREWORD OF THE SECOND EDITION

This *Story of the Mennonites* is largely a revision and enlargement of my earlier book *The Mennonites*. Its chief excuse exists in the fact that the latter is now long out of print; and since its publication, just before the close of the late World War, the status of the Mennonites, especially in central Europe and in Russia as well as in America, has been greatly changed by the course of events. A greatly increased interest among Mennonite scholars in research in recent years, too, has made available much information not known even a few years ago.

While the work has been based on careful research in all the available source material on the subject, yet I have continually kept the general reader in mind in my writing, rather than the specialist; and for that reason I have not cluttered up the text with foot notes and references to sources.

Most of the general Mennonite histories in America thus far have been written from the standpoint of one of the many branches of the denomination, stressing especially the development of that particular branch, usually at the expense of the others; and thus giving a distorted picture of the denomination as a whole. I have attempted in this narrative to cover the whole Mennonite movement both in Europe and America in all its ramifications, objectively and impartially but sympathetically, without favor or prejudice; and have given each event, as well as each one of the score or more of the branches and local or national groups the space it deserves, in my judgment, in its relation to the story as a whole.

The Mennonites during much of their history have everywhere formed not only a religious party, but also frequently a distinct economic or social group, or even



as in Russia a separate political entity. And so, this narrative has not been confined only to the religious experiences of the Mennonites, but much space has been given to their social and economic development as well.

C. Henry Smith  
Bluffton, Ohio  
October 1, 1940

## PREFACE TO THE FOURTH EDITION

The fourth edition contains only minor changes since the second edition (1950) was thoroughly revised. Obvious errors in facts and spelling have been corrected and some paragraphs have been added in order to bring chapters dealing with the present up to date. Some of the illustrations were exchanged for charts, which should prove to be helpful to the reader. The list of "Illustrations and Charts" has been added and appears on page x. The helpful suggestions made by J. Neale Carman, J. Herbert Fretz, Melvin Gingerich, Ira D. Landis and G. Lohrenz are much appreciated.

June, 1957  
North Newton, Kansas

Cornelius Krahn

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EUROPE



# I

## THE ANABAPTISTS

### THE SWISS BRETHERN

#### **The Reformation**

Every historical movement, be it political, social, or religious, tends in the course of its progress to throw off both conservative and radical wings. The French Revolution had its emigres and its sansculottes; our own Civil War, its copperheads and its abolitionists. Socialism runs all the way from opportunism to communism. Just as the political parties in Europe during the past hundred years have been classified in accordance with their conservative or liberal attitude toward questions of public policy, and have been named in accordance with their relative position to the presiding officer in the assembly hall as Right, Center and Left, so, too, the religious groups of the Reformation may be roughly classified upon a similar basis. The Catholics remained the conservative Right; the Lutherans, discarding many of the fundamental doctrines of the Catholics, but yet retaining much of their ceremonialism and ritualism in worship, and a conservative though slightly modified form of the doctrine of the real presence, might appropriately be called the Right Center; the Reformed party, much more liberal than the Lutherans both in worship and doctrine, but still retaining one of the central features of the old church, union of state and church, might qualify equally well as the Left Center; while the Anabaptists, the party of the common people, without a religious hierarchy of any sort, basing both their faith and prac-

tise on the example of the New Testament church, preaching a voluntary, free, and independent religious organization entirely separated from the state, were clearly the extreme Left of that day.

The Anabaptists with whom we are here concerned had their beginning as a separate religious body in Zurich, Switzerland as a radical wing of Zwinglianism in the beginning of that movement. In the early period of his reforming career, Zwingli seemed much more inclined than in his later years to radical changes from the old order; especially did he seem more interested than did his Catholic brethren in a study of the Bible, and in finding within its covers a solution for the problems of his day. Soon after his installation as the chief preacher of Zurich in 1518, he preached against tithes, and spoke lightly of church fasts; soon, too, he opposed Swiss military service in the armies of the Pope, though not on scriptural, but rather on social and economic grounds. As an army chaplain among these mercenary troops he had ample opportunity for observing the evil results of this foreign service, first upon the morals of the troops themselves, and later indirectly upon the Swiss communities to which they returned after service.

But liberal as he was, he did not succeed in satisfying all his co-reformers. There were some to whom the cause of reform was not moving swiftly enough. These were the first to find fault with the mass, the observance of saints' days, the use of pictures and images in worship, and other orthodox Catholic religious practises. In 1522, Wilhelm Reublin, driven out of Basel because of his excessive reforming zeal, having carried a Bible in a procession instead of the usual relics, which he declared to be dead men's bones, joined the Zurich circle as pastor in the neighboring village of Wytikon. The next year this same priest was the first of the clergy

to take a wife. At the same time Ludwig Hetzer, by birth a South German, and by training a learned Habraist, greatly stirred up the populace with a tract against images and pictures as used in worship. Up in Waldshut, just across the border, Balthasar Hubmaier, a famous theologian and former university rector, was beginning to deny the validity of infant baptism. Simon Stumpf, pastor at Höngg, a village just on the outskirts of Zurich, was preaching against tithes and rents.



Zurich, Switzerland, Scene of Reformation

Zwingli, although inclined to follow these friends of reform, cautioned them to move slowly; and refused to march ahead of public opinion, or to inaugurate any innovations without the consent of the political authorities. Desirous of testing out the opinion of the public, he consented to a general debate in Zurich, in January of 1523, in which all the parties, Catholics included, were to ex-



press themselves freely on the religious questions of the day. In this disputation Zwingli was easily the central figure, occupying a middle position between the conservative and liberal groups. He favored, among other innovations, the immediate abolition of the mass, the rejection of celibacy, the dissolution of monasteries and convents, the use of the vernacular instead of Latin in the baptismal service, and a simplification all around of the forms of worship; but he refused to go any further, especially condemning the movement directed against the destruction of images and pictures.

Considerable progress having been made by the reform movement during the summer of 1523, another public discussion was held in October on the issues that now separated the different factions of the Reformed group. The Catholics were not represented at this meeting. It was in this debate that Zwingli and his radical friends parted company. When the former suggested in the course of a controversy that certain irreconcilable differences between the factions should be referred to the Zurich Council for final decision, Simon Stumpf, the spokesman on this occasion for the radicals declared, "Master Ulrich, you have no right to refer this question to the Council; the matter is already settled, the Spirit of God has decided." Here we have the very heart of what is later known as Anabaptism. Religion is a matter of individual conscience. Neither an ecclesiastical hierarchy, as the Catholics maintained, nor political authority as the Zwinglians declared, has a right to dictate in matters of faith.

And so, during the two following years, while the new state church was formulating its policies and practises, the breach between the radical wing and the main body of Zwinglian dissenters was growing ever wider. Conrad Grebel, Felix Manz, Wilhelm Reublin, and Simon

Stumpf now began to insist not only upon a complete break with the Catholic establishment, but upon a new church, completely renovated from the ground up, and based on principles and doctrines so revolutionary that the break with the Zwinglians, too, seemed inevitable. What they asked for now was a "pure" church, not necessarily a church composed of men and women who were sinless, but rather sin-conscious; adult men and women, not children; men and women who knew right from wrong, and who of their own volition as a result of deep-seated religious conviction had formed themselves into a voluntary band of worshipers after the example of apostolic times. This small company, holding these views, was in the habit of meeting in the homes of various members of the group, spending their time largely in Bible study, in which Zwingli had at first occasionally joined for a time. The more they studied the New Testament the more they were convinced that their conception of the true church was the right one.

Zwingli, whatever his earlier views may have been, was by this time firmly resolved, however, against any church establishment that was not dominated by the Council of Zurich. He was not yet ready for a "pure" church, nor for a separation of church and state. "What will the angels in heaven have to do on judgment day," he said, "if the tares be separated from the wheat here and now?" "The ark contained both pure and impure," said Bullinger, his successor. These and similar naive arguments were advanced by the state-church defenders in an attempt to find biblical authority against religious toleration.

A pure, voluntary, church made up of those definitely conscious of sin, and admitted upon confession of faith, of course left no room in its religious practise for infant baptism, if that event was regarded as an

essential symbol of admission into the church. Infant baptism then for a year or two became the chief bone of contention in the arguments between the two groups among the Swiss reformers.

Among the first of the radicals to preach against the practise were Wilhelm Reublin and Balthasar Hubmaier. The former had persuaded many of the parents in his parish of Wytekon, early in 1523, to withhold baptism from their children; while the latter, as we have already seen, had an argument on the subject with Zwingli the following year. Both these men, and their followers after them, maintained that baptism according to the New Testament must be based on faith; and since children cannot have faith, their baptism has no validity. Zwingli drawing his arguments from the same Bible though not always from the New Testament, replied that infant baptism in the New Testament, took the place of circumcision in the Old, and advanced other arguments equally farfetched. There is no place in the Bible where infant baptism is commanded, declared the Biblicists. "Nor can you show where it is forbidden," replied Zwingli. And so the argument continued without convincing either side; but the unbiased student cannot help but conclude that from the standpoint of direct scriptural authority the radicals made out the better case.

Whether Zwingli's earlier liberalism would entitle him to be classed with the party later known as Anabaptists, as some writers on this subject maintain, is highly problematical. That he at one time questioned the validity of infant baptism, in spite of his later defense of the practise, of course is known from his own confession. But he never accepted the heart of what we shall know a little later as Anabaptism—a regenerate church, practising separatism, pacifism and their allied doctrines. His earlier so-called pacifism was based on expediency,

and not on religious conviction. A man must be judged not only by what he says, but also by what he does. Up to 1520, Zwingli drew a papal pension as an army chaplain, and ten years later he led Swiss troops in a fratricidal civil war, himself falling in battle. He never advocated adult baptism; and he never practised religious toleration.

This new controversy led to another public debate on January 17, 1525. The purpose of this meeting, which was sponsored by both Zwingli and the Council, unlike its predecessors, was not to arrive at an open decision on the issue of infant baptism, but rather to silence the opposition. The final decision by the Council in favor of Zwingli's view was a foregone conclusion. The political authorities as well as those of the church were not ready yet for a pure, voluntary and separatist church. Within a few days after this meeting the Council ordered that all children must be baptized within eight days, the special meetings for Bible study must be discontinued; and such radical leaders of the movement as were not natives of Zurich were to be banished. This last order involved Hetzer, Castelberger, Brödli, and Reublin.

### **Early Leaders**

It may not be out of place here to say a little more about the men who thus far led the movement for an independent church.

First among these must be mentioned Conrad Grebel, native of Zurich, and son of councilman Jacob Grebel. Conrad, although a layman, was well-educated in the schools of his time, including the universities of Paris and Vienna. He was well-connected socially, belonging to one of the most prominent families in the city of Zurich; and was a brother-in-law of Vadian of St. Gall,

next to Zwingli the leading Swiss reformer. After leading a rather irregular life as a young man, he finally became interested in the reform movement, associating himself closely with the Zurich leader by whom he was called "that candid and learned youth."

By 1523, however, Grebel began to break with Zwingli. He soon assumed a leading role in the agitation against infant baptism, and finally was the first to administer baptism upon confession of faith in 1525, inaugurating the movement that became known as "Anabaptism." He finally died of the pest in 1526, still a young man, thus undoubtedly escaping a later martyr's death. His father, too, met his death the same year at the hands of a Zurich executioner, though not for religious unorthodoxy, but on a charge of treason.

Felix Manz, son of a canon of the cathedral church was also a native of Zurich. At first an ardent disciple of Zwingli, he followed Grebel into the opposition upon the former's refusal to sanction an apostolic church; and was Grebel's close associate in all the later events; and a most zealous preacher of the new doctrines. He, too, was well-educated, being especially a good Hebrew scholar. It was in his mother's home that the small circle of radicals held their Bible readings after their separation from the state church. Frequently imprisoned because he refused to obey the orders of the Zurich Council to cease preaching and baptizing, Manz was the first martyr of the new cause, being drowned near the head of the Lake of Zurich in January of 1527.

Georg Blaurock of Chur, of the House of Jacob, a monastic establishment, called "Blaurock" because of the color of his cloak, and sometimes also spoken of as "Strong George," was, next to the two above-mentioned, the most important leader of the new cause immediately after the debate of 1525. His most important work, how-



ever, was concerned with preaching Anabaptist gospel throughout northern Switzerland and Tyrol in the years immediately following. The major part of his story, therefore, belongs to a later period. It is said that during the next four years of his short but busy life he baptized over one thousand converts within these regions. He had renounced the Catholic church before 1523. He soon after came to Zwingli for help to solve his religious doubts; but failing to find here a satisfactory answer to his questionings, he cast his lot with the Zurich radicals.

Wilhelm Reublin, born at Rottenberg on the Neckar, the fiery preacher of Wytikon, was one of the first advocates, as we have seen, of radical changes; and was also one of the first to get into trouble with the authorities, being banished from Basel in 1522 and imprisoned in Zurich in 1524. He was intimately associated with Grebel and Manz in all their religious pioneering, and was present at the January debate. He became an early and influential missionary to Tyrol and Moravia, and seemingly was one of the few Anabaptists who did not fall a victim to the executioner's ax because of his religious faith. He died a natural death sometime near the middle of the century.

These four men were the leaders of the radical movement up to the time of the debate on baptism in 1525, and were present at that historic event. Associated with these four were a number of other equally earnest and pious men with no less zeal, though with perhaps less ability. Among these was Andreas Castelberger, evidently a cripple, for he is frequently spoken of in the early records as Andreas "on crutches." He came originally from Basel, and was known as an ardent advocate of social reform. Heinrich Aberli, who furnished a temporary asylum, contrary to the law of the land, in the home of a friend for Hubmaier at the time the latter was exiled



from Waldshut, and who was one of the signers with Grebel and others of a letter to Münster in 1524, must have taken an aggressive part in all the activities of the Zurich radicals, for soon after the great debate in 1525 he testified that he had already been imprisoned in the tower four times. Simon Stumpf, pastor of Höngg, as we saw, was the first publicly to challenge Zwingli's right to submit religious questions to any other authority than that of the Bible. Space permits the mention here of but two more among a long list of pioneers in the struggle for freedom of conscience—Hans Brödli, of Zöllikon, whose name after the fashion of that day sometimes appears in its Latinized form, "Paniculum"; and Lorenz Hochrütiner of St. Gall, banished several years before from Zurich, who became a radical leader among the working men of his adopted canton. Balthasar Hubmaier and Ludwig Hetzer, identifying themselves with the Anabaptist movement later on, need no extended notice at this point.

### **Introduction of Adult Baptism**

About this time, whether before or after the debate above mentioned, is not quite certain, but likely after, this small group of devoted disciples of a New Testament church, these reformers of a reformation, took the next step which logically followed their rejection of infant baptism, and which completely separated them from the Zwinglian party and inaugurated the movement known as Anabaptism. They introduced the rite of adult baptism upon confession of faith.

It was at one of the private meetings held for a study of the Bible at which Grebel, Manz, Blaurock and others were present, that Grebel, who no doubt was recognized as a leader of the group, though not an ordained preacher, baptized Blaurock who then in turn baptized a num-

ber of others present. This act was followed by the breaking of bread. The significance of this event lies in the fact that it marks the complete break with the state-church party, and inaugurated a new church based on the revolutionary principle of religious toleration, and admission to which was based upon confession of faith through adult baptism. The Zwinglians soon spoke of the new party as *Wiedertäufer* ("rebaptizers"); but the latter, denying that they were rebaptized, since their first baptism as infants was not valid, rejecting the name, called one another *Brethren*. In South Germany the names *Täufer*, and *Taufgesinnte*, became common; while in Holland, a little later, *Doopsgezinde* was applied to those who held the same views as the Swiss Brethren. In Latin countries, and in England, the term *Anabaptist* came into common use.

This radical departure from the religious practises of the day, it is needless to say, met with most bitter opposition from both the Zurich Council, representing the temporal authorities, and Zwingli in behalf of the state clergy. Both state and church were now determined to secure by legal force what they had been unable to accomplish by moral suasion. To the mandates already on the statute books against all those who preached against infant baptism, new and more stringent ones were passed against such as preached and practised rebaptism. Parents, too, refusing to have their children baptized, were to be fined one silver mark for a first offense and were to be exiled for repeated disobedience.

It is one thing, however, to abolish religious conviction by law, and quite another to enforce it. The native citizens did not cease their preaching and baptizing; nor did those from out of town immediately take their departure. "We must obey God rather than man," they said. And so it was not long until Grebel, Manz, Blau-

rock, Brödli, and others had been cast into prison to remain on a bread-and-water diet "until they rot." Prison discipline at first must have been rather lax, and collusion with jailors frequent; for the prisoners repeatedly escaped, only to be rearrested as they continued to follow their convictions rather than the orders of the Council. Heinrich Aberli complained, at the time of his imprisonment in the winter of 1527, that this was the fifth time he had been sent to the tower in less than two years.

### Persecution Sets in

Failing to stamp out the rapidly spreading faith of the Brethren by imprisonment, the Council finally decided on March 7, 1526, on more drastic measures. Such leaders as refused to comply with the orders already issued were to be punished by drowning. It was not until a full year later, however, that this threat was actually carried out. The first victim was Felix Manz. On January 5, 1527, with his hands tied to his knees so as to prevent any possibility of escape from the water, accompanied by a Reformed clergyman who tried to the last to secure a recantation, the unhappy man was rowed from the town hall in Zurich down the Limmat, his mother and brother following along the banks shouting words of encouragement. Just where the Limmat River leaves beautiful Lake Zurich, reflecting the blue sky above and the deep green hills along the shore, just about where the upper bridge now spans the stream, Manz uttering his last prayer "Father into Thy hands I commit my soul" was tossed overboard and disappeared beneath the waves, the first of a long line of martyrs who preferred to die rather than to give up their faith. On the same day Georg Blaurock as an alien, "stripped to the waist," was whipped out of town.

The fires of persecution were now kindled. Scores of martyrs followed the fate of Manz in the same year in many lands, and thousands in the years to come. For a full century and more, not only in Switzerland, but all over South Germany, Austria and Moravia, up and down the Rhine and the upper Danube, wherever they were found, Anabaptists had to pay the extreme price for their faith. They were left to rot in prison, broken on the rack, thrown into rivers and lakes, burned at the stake, beheaded and buried alive.

To all this terrible butchery the organized church whether Catholic, Lutheran or Calvinistic gave its full assent and assistance. The day of religious toleration had not yet arrived. In fact even the dawn was still a hundred years in the future. Zwingli, whose conscience perhaps troubled him somewhat, tried to justify the execution of Manz on the ground that the charges against him were political rather than religious. But the most casual acquaintance with the facts precludes any such explanation.

That Zwingli was reluctant at first to try extreme measures was to his credit. That he was not by nature disposed to cruelty, and that he acted from what he regarded as worthy motives may well be admitted. But being thoroughly committed to the state-church idea, he had no sympathy for the separatism involved in the Anabaptist movement. For several years he tried to win the Brethren over to his views by argument and moral suasion, and in the hope of ultimate success he may even have used his influence with the Zurich Council to delay radical action. But when once convinced that the Brethren could not be won over by argument, he was ready to go the limit. From then on he travelled hand-in-glove with the political authorities in every attempt to root out by the severest measures necessary what he regarded

as a menace to the perpetuity of the established ecclesiastical order. He was not a friend of soul liberty.

The fanatical persecuting zeal of that time must be interpreted in the light of the spirit of the age. Religious toleration was still an unheard-of virtue in the days of Luther and Zwingli. For many years to come men and women were still born into compulsory membership in two equally all-embracing and powerful social organizations—one civil, the other ecclesiastical—the state and the church. In neither case was there any choice in the matter. Disloyalty to the one was treason, to the other heresy; both punishable by death. The Anabaptist doctrine of an independent church was, therefore, considered dangerously radical. To the privileged classes especially—the ecclesiastical hierarchy, as well as temporal rulers, whether bishop, priest or pastor, Catholic or Protestant—who enjoyed comfortable livings from compulsory church taxes, there would be little attraction in a religious system which would abolish the tithe, and substitute for it uncertain voluntary support, and whose advocates refused to attend the prevailing church and observe the customary holy days.

It was but natural, too, that many of the unusual religious practises of the Brethren should be misunderstood and often wilfully misinterpreted. The secret meetings at night, held in out-of-the-way places, were made the basis for charges of immorality; because they refused to have their children baptized, they were called soul murderers by such as believed that baptismal water had the magic power to save; marriage by their own ministers instead of the regular clergy made them adulterers, and branded their children as illegitimate, with no legal rights. To these charges, based on misrepresentations, were added others of a more serious nature. There was



no doubt some truth in the contention of both Lutherans and Reformed that in their struggle against the Catholic party the defection of the Anabaptists gave considerable comfort to the common enemy. The various peasants' revolts raging throughout northern Switzerland and southern Germany just at this time, too, caused the governing authorities to regard with evident suspicion all mass movements among the common people, peaceful and religious, as well as violent and revolutionary. Serious also, from the standpoint of the state, was the refusal of the Brethren to take the oath and hold office, or go to war. All these charges, given wide publicity by the leaders of the state churches, aroused a widespread distrust of the Anabaptist cause wherever it appeared. This is not to be regarded, of course, as a justification of the terrible persecution inflicted by church and state upon these devoted and sincere pioneers of religious liberty, but merely as an attempt to explain it in the light of the spirit of the age.

### **Spread of the Faith**

In the meantime Anabaptism had spread rapidly beyond the confines of the Canton of Zurich. The blood of the martyrs, it is said, is the seed of the church. So it was here. Driven on by the rod of persecution, and urged forward by a burning zeal to share their newly-found freedom with their fellows, the leaders of the movement soon carried their story into neighboring lands. Within a short time after the debate of 1525 Grebel had gone to Schaffhausen; Brödli to Hallau; and Reublin, to Waldshut, where he had baptized Hubmaier and his whole congregation. Anabaptist centers were soon established in all the important cities of the northern cantons. In Appenzell, according to one authority, a flourishing congregation of fifteen hundred developed immediately;

in St. Gall, under the leadership of Lorenz Hochrütiner the new faith almost made a clean sweep, nearly emptying the Catholic churches. The people here, says Kessler, a well-known historian of that period, "ran after baptism as the Galatians after circumcision."

Under the leadership of such men as Reublin, Hetzer, Hubmaier and others the movement rapidly flowed over into South Germany, Tyrol, Austria and Moravia. Before 1527 it had entered the regions of the upper Danube and the upper Rhine, and by 1530 down the latter stream into The Netherlands and northwestern Germany, where numerous congregations had been planted in nearly all the large cities. Sebastian Franck, an old chronicler of that day, and not unsympathetic to the new faith says,

In the year 1526 a new party arose whose leaders and bishops were Hubmaier, Rink, Denk and Hetzer. They spread so rapidly that their teaching soon covered the whole land and they secured a large following and also added to their number many good hearts who were zealous toward God.

The valleys of the Rhine, however, and the upper Danube as far east as Vienna remained the exclusive home of the new movement throughout its entire early history. Just why may be a matter of interesting speculation. Perhaps because within the confines of these valleys were to be found the big cities of commerce, and centers of culture and intellectual life. It was these same regions to which the whole Reformation movement was largely confined; and Anabaptism was merely a liberal wing of that movement. The first Anabaptist congregations were all found in the big cities. It was only after the Brethren were driven under cover by persecution that they forsook the cities, and found refuge in remote country places and mountain fastnesses.

## Relation to Waldenses

This rapid and seemingly spontaneous spread of the new party within well-defined territorial limits has led certain students of this question to the conclusion that Anabaptism must have had its origin largely in other evangelical sects which had existed for some time in these same regions, especially the Waldenses. Among other arguments with which the theory of Waldensian origin is supported is the similarity of the two faiths in doctrine and practise, their presence in the same cities and localities, the disappearance of the Waldenses with the coming of the Anabaptists in these same localities, and the similarity among both of certain family names not common elsewhere. That these earlier sects in middle Europe may have had some influence upon the later Anabaptist movement may be granted, but that the latter are merely made over Waldenses cannot be maintained. There are too many weak links in the chain of evidence that would trace the one entirely to the other. Among these is the lack of evidence of a direct connection. The first Anabaptist leaders all came directly out of the Catholic church; and with but one or two possible exceptions none seem to have had any Waldensian connections. Waldensian congregations did not completely die out with the coming of the Reformation. Some of them remain to this day.

Neither is it necessary to account for the similarity of the two faiths in doctrine and practise on the ground of a direct connection. There are other more plausible explanations. Both attempted a literal reproduction of the same model, the apostolic church as portrayed in the New Testament. Both discarded all the accumulated tradition and authority prevalent in the prevailing state churches not based directly upon a simple literal following of the Bible. The two were alike because they fol-

lowed the same model. There would have been an Anabaptist movement even though the Waldenses had never been heard of. This was just the time, it will be remembered, when the Bible began to be widely read by the common people. Numerous whole and partial editions and reprints were being published all along the Rhine valley during the last quarter of the fifteenth, and the first half of the sixteenth centuries. The fact, too, that the Sermon on the Mount furnished a program of social reform adequate to meet the needs of the oppressed peasants and working men of the day may not have been the least of the factors in the rapid spread of Anabaptism among the masses.

### **Outlawed by Imperial Decree**

The period of rapid growth, however, was of short duration. Church and state united in an effort to root out a movement which if successful would endanger the grip which the privileged classes held upon both the bodies and spirits of the masses. The world was not yet ready for a democracy of either religion or government. Although the authorities never quite succeeded in completely strangling the movement, they did drive it under cover, and in a few years removed all possibility of its having a large popular following. In the northern Swiss cantons, in South Germany, in Moravia, Tyrol, Austria and wherever the Brethren had carried their faith, bishops, kings and emperors with but few exceptions condemned them—men, women and children to the executioner's block or the burning stake. The imperial Diet of Speier, in 1529, by an edict of outlawry effective throughout the empire, practically shut off the hope of milder treatment on the part of such local rulers as personally favored a more humane policy. By 1530 the rapid advance

of the movement was checked; and most of the pioneer leaders, after a few years of devoted service to the cause, had followed Manz to a martyr's grave. Grebel, as we saw, had died of the pest in 1526; Sattler, burned at the stake in Rottenberg in 1527; Hubmaier met the same fate in Vienna during this year, as did Hut in Augsburg; in 1529 Blaurock was executed in Innsbruck; and Hetzer was beheaded in Constance. But few died a natural death. Execution was frequently preceded by acts of the most horrible cruelty. Typical was the case of Michael Sattler.

Sattler, an ex-monk, while engaged in missionary efforts in South Germany was apprehended and tried in Rottenburg. The court decreed that he "shall be delivered to the executioner, who shall lead him to the place of execution and cut out his tongue, and then throw him upon a wagon, and then tear his body twice with red hot tongs, and after he has been brought within the gate he shall be pinched five times in the same manner." This order was carried out literally, and was followed by burning at the stake. The charges made against Sattler were that he preached against the real presence, infant baptism, worship of Mary and the saints, oath, warfare, extreme unction, communion of one kind, and finally that "he had left the order and married a wife."

## **Essentials of Anabaptism**

The essentials of Anabaptism—an independent, voluntary church composed of adult members, sin-conscious, and admitted into membership by baptism upon confession of faith, have already been referred to. It remains now to discuss a bit more in detail the whole system of beliefs and practises which grew out of these fundamental principles as they developed during the early years of the movement.



Since the act of baptism, shorn of all the magic power to insure eternal salvation with which the Catholic theologians had clothed it, was regarded merely as an initiatory formula signifying admittance into the church, not much weight was attached to the particular form under which it was administered. Although immersion was practised in a few isolated cases, some form of sprinkling or pouring was the prevailing custom. Hans Brubacher, of Zumikon, describing his own baptismal experiences says he was *bespritzt*, by Blaurock; Hans Hottinger was admitted into membership with a "hand full of water." Hubmaier administered the rite to his congregation at Waldshut "out of a milk pail"; Fridli Schumacher met Brödli at Hirslanden in South Germany, and was baptized by him at a well. A few leaders seemingly preferred to baptize near the banks of a stream or in running water.

Religion among the Brethren was decidedly a personal matter. Conversions were sudden, resulting from a deep conviction of a sinful life, followed by a strong sense of contrition. The case of Hans Brubacher above mentioned, who before his baptism, "fell on his knees and with bitter tears lamented his sinful state," was typical. The whole movement was thoroughly evangelistic, and characterized by a strong missionary zeal. Meetings were held day and night. Bible reading, exhortation, testimonies, and singing of hymns, often of their own composition, constituted a large part of the worship. Baptism was administered no doubt to new recruits at nearly every meeting, followed usually by the breaking of bread, and occasionally by the washing of feet, after the example of the early apostolic church. Except in a few cases in the beginning like that of Hubmaier at Waldshut, and Hochrütiner at St. Gall, who were able to carry along their entire congregations into the new faith, these meet-

ings had to be held secretly in private houses, or often at night in out-of-the-way places. It was years, and in some cases centuries before the Anabaptists had meeting houses.

In fact the whole movement was an attempt to reproduce as literally as possible the primitive apostolic church in its original purity and simplicity; and restore Christianity once more to a basis of individual responsibility. The Bible to these prophets of a new world-order was the sole source of spiritual authority; the apostolic church, their model; and the Sermon on the Mount quite literally interpreted their social and religious program. In their respect for the Bible, of course, they were not altogether unique among the Reformation parties. Luther and Zwingli also claimed a scriptural basis for their innovations. It was rather in their interpretation of what the Scriptures meant than in their respect for them that they differed from the other parties. And yet it must be admitted that the Anabaptists relied more exclusively and more devotedly upon the Bible than did the others as a guide in their search after God. While Lutherans and Reformed claimed the assistance of governing councils and university faculties in their interpretations, and Catholics of a highly organized hierarchy and the church fathers, the Anabaptists insisted that each individual must decide the Bible message for himself. The greatest degree of liberty must be granted the individual conscience in spiritual matters. Anabaptism was the essence of individualism. No other people during the Reformation period knew the contents of the Bible as did the Anabaptists. *Biblicists* they are sometimes called.

This does not mean of course that they were religious anarchists; that they were indifferent to essential fundamental beliefs; that any one of their number might hold any beliefs he pleased, and at the same time remain

within their fellowship. They soon accumulated a well-defined body of beliefs and practises agreed upon by congregations and conferences to which they insisted all members of the group must subscribe, or remove themselves from the fellowship of the body. But they did not believe in the use of physical force to bring about uniformity.

Neither did they favor a specially trained and supported ministry. Like the missionaries in the primitive church, these were to live by the labor of their own hands. The ministry was to be regarded as a labor of love. "Hirelings" was a term often applied to the state clergy. Benefices and fat livings were as frequently criticised as any other practise among the established institutions. Ministers were chosen by the congregation from among their own number, often by lot. The first leaders, of course, were highly-trained men, converts for the most part from the Catholic priesthood or university graduates. But after these had been killed off, and the Brethren had been driven under cover, there were few trained leaders among them. As a result their theology from then on tended to become decidedly biblical, but never philosophical.

Among the fundamental Anabaptist doctrines few led to more trouble with the governmental authorities than that of non-resistance. Love, the Brethren said, must be the basis of all social relations. "Love thine enemies," and "Resist not evil" were injunctions as binding as any others in the New Testament and must be taken literally. This principle they tried to follow in all their individual as well as group relationships, even though its application might bring them into conflict with the ruling authorities occasionally. War they refused to sanction, and military service they rejected as un-Christian. Instead of appearing in public places, as was

the custom of the time, with daggers in their belts, they wore short wooden staves.

In Switzerland, where military service was considered more or less obligatory at the time, and the letting of mercenary soldiers an important source of public revenue, this refusal to bear arms later became one of the serious charges against them on the part of the temporal rulers. In other countries, however, where universal service was not demanded, the refusal to go to war was not the leading cause of persecution.

The attitude toward the magistrate's office also was a continual source of misunderstanding. According to Anabaptist theory no Christian could hold a political office, although it was his duty to give his government implicit obedience insofar as it did not conflict with his conscience. This duty rested not only on the doctrine of non-resistance, but upon positive New Testament injunction as well, the order to be obedient to the civil authorities. By the same authority the Christian is enjoined to pray for his rulers. But with prayer and obedience it was thought all obligation ended. Not that government is not necessary; it is, but not for the Christian. There are two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world. In the worldly kingdom, which is essentially evil, government is necessary for the purpose of protecting the good and punishing the evil. It is the duty of the worldly government, therefore, to protect the Christian; but in the kingdom of God force is not necessary. Rather a naïve and somewhat selfish political philosophy one is inclined to think in this day of religious liberty, and political democracy; but perfectly inevitable and logical in that day of intolerance and union of state and church. If the magistracy must enforce religious uniformity, and burn men at the stake for their religious beliefs, then of course no Christian, according

to the Anabaptist standard, who believed in absolute soul liberty, could consistently hold office. But the Scriptures enjoin obedience to civil authority. The only possible escape from this dilemma, if one wished to reconcile his heavenly with his earthly citizenship, was that pointed out by the Anabaptist view above mentioned. The strong sense of other-worldliness which characterized the whole life of the Anabaptists, the conviction that they were not of this world, aroused and intensified by the terrible persecutions which they suffered, no doubt greatly strengthened this feeling that their citizenship was rather a heavenly than an earthly one.

Their refusal to take an oath, too, was generally construed as an act of rebellion against the temporal government. But in reality it had no such meaning among the Anabaptists. Although its rejection for any reason whatsoever may have been perfectly in keeping with their attitude toward the magistracy, yet opposition was primarily based on a literal interpretation of the injunction "Swear not at all."

Religion, pure and undefiled, to the Anabaptists was not merely a set of dogmas, but a life. It must function in improved conduct. It is a fact well-known among church historians that moral conditions among the people were not immediately bettered by the early reformers; in fact as respect for Catholic doctrines declined, and the discipline of the church grew correspondingly more lax, the general moral standards of the time were lowered rather than raised among the masses. A state church with a compulsory membership, and little personal discipline beyond the insistence upon orthodox beliefs at best was not conducive to an improvement in morality.

The Brethren on the other hand insisted from the start that the new faith must bear fruit in purer living. Conrad Grebel informed an early applicant for baptism



that church membership required of him that he be free from adultery, gambling, drunkenness, usury, and other vices of the day. Ludwig Hetzer undoubtedly wrote the first prohibition treatise of modern times in his tract *Evangelical Cups*. Discipline against an occasional offender was rigidly enforced among the Brethren. According to the *Schleitheim Articles* of 1527, the earliest Anabaptist confession on record, any member having fallen into gross sin, and refusing to repent after having been admonished according to Matthew 18, was to be expelled from membership. Kessler, describing the daily life of the Swiss Brethren, says of them—

Their daily walk and deportment appears to be upright, godly and entirely blameless. They shun costly clothes, avoid excessive eating and drinking, wear coarse clothing, and broad felt hats. They go about humbly, without weapons, neither swords nor pikes, but with a short bread knife. They seem much more concerned about living an upright life than the Papists.

The grand duke of Hesse, speaking a little later of the Anabaptists of middle Germany declared—

I see more upright living among those that are called sects than among the Lutherans.

Both of these testimonials come from defenders of the state churches. Even their bitterest enemies could find no fault with their conduct except to call them "Wolves in sheep's clothing," and ascribe their piety and even the courage and fortitude with which they met death to the Devil. In fact Zwingli, realizing that the immorality found among some of the state clergy contributed not a little to the growth of Anabaptism, instituted a reform movement among his own clergy for more consistent living. In a synodal meeting held in Zurich in 1528 one pastor was accused by his congregation of swearing, drinking and gambling; another was con-



victed of stealing. The pastor at Steinmaur was removed for adultery. The one at Bulach, who was accused of neglecting his pastoral duties for worldly gain, was ordered to pursue a further course of study at Zurich. Among frequent charges brought against various clergymen were wife beating, frequenting of taverns, gambling and excessive drinking, fighting, pride and general neglect of duty. Unquestionably the high standards of personal sobriety and integrity maintained by the Anabaptists exerted a wholesome influence upon the personal conduct of both the clergy and laymen of the state churches among whom they lived.

In the matter of private property neither the Swiss Brethren nor their fellow Anabaptists elsewhere, with the exception of the Moravian Hutterites were communists, as was often charged against them. Benefices and fat livings of course held by the clergy, they decidedly opposed; but they did not object to private possessions of the laity. Compassion for the less fortunate, however, must constrain the possessor of an ample store of worldly goods to share his surplus liberally with the needy in case of distress. The Christian, after all, is merely a steward of his possessions, they said. But this is far from communism.

The Lord's Supper was a mere symbol, and not a sacrament in the sense in which that term was used by the churches believing in the real presence, clothed with magic power to save irrespective of the faith of the recipient. The ceremonial theory of baptism has been mentioned elsewhere. Anabaptist doctrines were inclined to be scriptural though not theologically speculative.

From the political and economic revolutionary movements, and peasant revolts then sweeping over Switzerland and South Germany the Swiss Brethren at least, whatever might be said of other parties that went under

the name of Anabaptist, remained remarkably free. Although they incorporated in their living the principles of fair dealing and economic justice taught in the Sermon on the Mount, they remained almost exclusively a religious party, disentangled from all the social and economic currents of the time. Their non-resistant principles forbade any fellowship with a movement that might require the use of force in gaining its objective, laudable though the goal might be.

### SOUTH GERMANY

As already noted, the Swiss Brethren, when driven out of their native cantons, carried their faith almost from the start across the border into South Germany. Within a few years good-sized congregations had been established in all the larger cities throughout Bavaria, Baden, Württemberg, the Palatinate, Alsace, and as far north as Thuringia and Saxony. The free imperial cities especially, centers of an active commercial life, where there was little governmental interference from local princes and kings, were favorable to the rapid growth of the new cause. One of the earliest and largest of these congregations was located at Augsburg.

Augsburg at this time was a city of some fifteen thousand, the leading financial and commercial center of all South Germany. It espoused the Reformation cause quite early, and was quite slow to choose between the Lutheran and Zwinglian parties. Just when Anabaptism made its first appearance here is not known exactly; but soon the city became a favorite meeting place for all the leaders of the movement throughout these regions. The first of the later prominent leaders to pass through was Hubmaier, who in the summer of 1526, while on his way from Switzerland to Moravia, stopped long enough

to baptize Hans Denk, who in turn became the organizer of the Augsburg congregation. Since the history of any movement is largely the life story of a few individuals, a short biographical sketch of this "Anabaptist Apollo" may not be out of place at this point.

## Hans Denk

Hans Denk, born in Bavaria about 1495, occupies an important place among the founders of German Anabaptism. Not much is known of his early life before 1523, when we find him in Basel as a university student and printer, a friend of Oecolampadius, and other Reformation leaders. Through his friend he received the appointment of rector of a school at Nürnberg at the age of 28. Here he remained only two years; for, allying himself with a group of radical reformers, who advocated many doctrines similar to those held by the Swiss Brethren, he was exiled by Osiander, the head of the Lutheran party in that city. At St. Gall, whither he fled, he had his first contact with the Anabaptists, though he did not join them at that time. It was in Augsburg, where he lived from September of 1525 to October of the following year, that he was baptized by Hubmaier as we have already seen. Here he soon built up a large congregation, and won over a number of men of local influence, including Eitelhans Langenmantel, member of a prominent family, and after Denk, the principal leader of the Augsburg group. Because of his activities in behalf of his faith, and influence among the masses, Denk was ordered into exile by both the city and ecclesiastical authorities. We next find him in Strassburg, where dissenters were still tolerated. Here he met such Anabaptists as Sattler and Hetzer, and such liberal evangelical thinkers as Sebastian Franck and Casper Schwenkfeld, as well as such tolerant state-church reformers as Martin Butzer and Wolfgang Capito, by all

of whom he was held in the highest esteem during his short stay in this city. Here he had hoped to retire from the public eye; and in collaboration with Hetzer, also a good Hebraist, to devote himself to a translation of the Hebrew Old Testament Prophets. But the fight against the Anabaptists was so bitter everywhere that he could not altogether evade the responsibilities of defending their cause. And so it was only after spending some time in missionary work in the general region of Strassburg—Worms, Landau, and Bergzabern, that he was still able to finish his translation which became so popular that ultimately it went through sixteen editions. In 1527 we find him in Augsburg again as chairman of the Martyrs' Synod. But his days were already numbered. Soon after this he returned to Basel, where, ill and heartbroken, driven from one city to another, he begged his old teacher, Oecolampadius, for permission to end his days in the city where he had begun his career some years before. He died a few months later of the pest, not yet thirty-two years old.

Hans Denk was one of the gentlest spirits of the Anabaptist group; and one of the noblest characters of the whole Reformation movement. A fine scholar, of a modest and retiring disposition, with little taste for religious controversy, he was yet destined, almost in spite of himself, to become through his voluminous writings, one of the chief defenders of the Anabaptist cause. As a disciple of Johannes Tauler, he was inclined toward mysticism. Although orthodox on most of the fundamentals of his adopted faith, yet he laid less stress than did most of his brethren on the worth and necessity of mere outward symbols and religious ceremonies. Although he was baptized, and rebaptized others, it is said that in his latter days he regretted the emphasis given to this as well as other ceremonial rites.

Like George Fox of a later period, he believed strongly in direct revelation through the voice of God in the hearts of men as a trustworthy means of finding God. The Bible alone is not sufficient. Faith could not be acquired by merely reading a book, he said. Like Francis of Assisi, whom he resembled in many respects, he, too, was so dominated by the idea of the love of God that in a passage in one of his books he expressed the doubt whether a loving God would condemn any one, even a confirmed sinner, to eternal punishment. He was not a strong believer in either Luther's doctrine of total depravity or election. Each individual, he said, had the greatest freedom of will in making his choice. Instead of discussing such questions as baptism, the Lord's Supper, the incarnation, and similar doctrines so dear to the hearts of the controversialists of that day, Denk wrote voluminously on the place in religious experience of love, faith, and the law of God.

Denk's mysticism, needless to say, capable of many interpretations, was often bitterly criticized by those not his friends. He was charged with all sorts of heresies—the universal salvation of all, even the Devil; the denial of the Trinity; and that sin was but an empty illusion. But a sympathetic reader of his works finds little ground for these charges, though one could hardly pronounce him an orthodox fundamentalist in all his theological views. He exerted great influence both through his writings and by personal contact upon his co-laborers; and no doubt his gentle mysticism served as a wholesome corrective to the formal literalism of his friend Michael Sattler, and the fanaticism of his disciple whom he baptized—Hans Hut. That Denk was a man of fine personality and rare charm is evident. Bader calls him the “renowned Hans Denk”; Vadian speaks of him as “a most gifted



youth"; Butzer refers to him as "the Anabaptist pope," and Haller as the "Anabaptist Apollo."

### Ludwig Hetzer

Associated with Denk, both in Augsburg and especially in Strassburg, was Ludwig Hetzer, whom we already saw as a pioneer Anabaptist in South Germany soon after his expulsion from Zurich in 1525. The two were associated not only in a partnership in the translation of portions of the Old Testament, but in all their efforts in behalf of the Anabaptist cause. Both were present at the Martyrs' Synod; but after that Hetzer's whereabouts is not so well known. He evidently was active though, for in a report from Nürnberg, January 1, 1528, he appears as "Ludwig Hetzer, an erect, lean, pale fellow, who, here in our town baptized many secretly." He was arrested in Constance the next year and was beheaded on a charge of immorality. This charge may have been a mere pretence to cover the real cause of his execution, that of being an Anabaptist. Such misrepresentations were frequent. Hetzer wrote a number of tracts on doctrinal and practical subjects, including as noted elsewhere a treatise on prohibition, *Evangelical Cups*. In this treatise Hetzer recommends as a cure for the excessive drinking of the day total abstinence. He does not even favor moderate drinking. "If one does not vomit at the table," he says, "he is considered as drinking moderately, even though he may have drunk three measures of wine." The true Christian can not call that evangelical which is antagonistic to the Gospel, he continues.

### The Martyrs' Synod

The Martyrs' Synod, held in Augsburg in 1527, attended by nearly all of the leaders of the region, and so called because so many of these leaders met a martyr's fate soon after, was called for the purpose of ironing out

certain differences of opinion that had arisen among the Brethren of South Germany and the Austrias due to the fanatical millennarian views of Hans Hut, one of Denk's converts; and to assign missionaries to various fields of labor in central Europe. This meeting marked the crest of Anabaptist prosperity in Augsburg. The congregation at the time numbered above one thousand. Soon after this the city authorities, urged on by the state-church hierarchy under the local direction of Urban Rhegius, as well as by imperial decree, and the example of other cities and principalities, decided upon a policy of extermination of all sects. The Brethren must renounce their faith, and their leaders were ordered under arrest. Many went into exile. By 1529, it was said, there were more than one hundred Augsburg Anabaptists in Strassburg alone, where liberty of conscience was still given some consideration. Among several others, Hut decided to remain. He was cast into prison soon after the big meeting, where he died from accidental burns. But even though dead, he was tried as a heretic, condemned and officially burned, or rather reburned at the stake. Langenmantel, because he was a native of the city, and because he was of a prominent family, was permitted to go into exile; but he, too, the next year suffered the death of a martyr. By 1530 there were few Anabaptists left in the city, though they were still to be found in seclusion in the regions around about.

### **Strassburg**

Equally important as an early Anabaptist center was the free city of Strassburg, seat of culture, and home of an active evangelical life during the late medieval age. Zwinglianism and Lutheranism were still contending for supremacy at the time, though a little later the former won. Capito and Butzer, the two religious leaders of the

city, both hesitated long before making their final choice in the matter. The former, especially, at first was quite sympathetic toward the dissenters; he even doubted the validity of infant baptism himself for a time, though, like Zwingli, he never became a separatist. Under these favorable conditions Strassburg remained an asylum for the persecuted groups during the late twenties at a time when they were being sent into exile and to the stake almost everywhere else.

A small circle of Swiss exiles banded themselves together as early as 1525. Here Hubmaier had his first treatise on baptism published, though it is not likely that he actively engaged in the spreading of his views at this time. Wilhelm Reublin, who arrived in the spring of 1526, is said to have been the first Anabaptist with whom Capito came into personal contact. Beginning with this latter year, however, and continuing for some years after, most of the prominent Anabaptists—Denk, Hetzer, Sattler, Reublin, Gross, Marbeck, Hoffman—all made visits at one time or another for shorter or longer periods to the city on the Rhine. Sattler and Hetzer even lived in the home of Capito for a time. Even after the growing intolerance of the age, and imperial edicts demanded that the Anabaptist movement be suppressed, the Strassburg authorities hesitated to use the harsh means to secure this end that were common elsewhere. Both Capito and Butzer favored moderate treatment as long as possible, hoping that argument and mild treatment would be a more effective means of winning back the erring than banishment and the stake. As late as 1536 the city council advised that those accused of membership in the sect be put to some useful public work, rather than to be cast into prison. Even though banishment was resorted to finally, the death penalty seemingly was never imposed in Strassburg for religious dissent. All through the six-

teenth century, too, the city was a favorite meeting place for Anabaptist and Mennonite general councils.

### Michael Sattler

Among the influential Strassburg leaders who have not already been given extended notice elsewhere must be included Michael Sattler, a South German ex-monk who had joined the Brethren in Zurich from whence he had come to Strassburg as an exile. His brief service in behalf of his faith like that of most of his fellow laborers was packed full of intense activity and devoted self sacrifice. He is credited with being the author of the first Anabaptist confession of faith on record, the *Schleitheim Articles* of 1527. It was during this year, too, that, while engaged in missionary work along the lower Neckar, he was apprehended in a little village called Horb, and later executed in Rottenburg with horrible torture. The story of his execution told elsewhere in this chapter, is recorded in the *Martyrs' Mirror*. He evidently was a man of strong convictions and a firm advocate of a rather ritualistic interpretation of the New Testament practises. He did not hesitate to differ vigorously with Denk's mysticism, though he did not refuse to work with Denk in behalf of their common cause. Sattler must have been a man of unusual piety and humility. Even Butzer, the less tolerant of the two Strassburg reformers, refers to him as a "martyr in Christ; even though he was a leader among the Anabaptists, he was much more reasonable and honorable than some of the rest."

### Pilgram Marbeck

Pilgram Marbeck also should be given brief notice here as a rather unusual man. Of pious Catholic parentage, he early became an Anabaptist in Tyrol where as a

mining engineer he held an important government position. Forced to leave his Tyrolean home presumably because of persecution, he appeared among the Brethren first in Augsburg in 1527, then in Strassburg the following year. In the latter city he won the favor of the authorities because of his aid in building a difficult engineering project which proved of great benefit to the public. It was for this reason no doubt that he was dealt with more generously than most Anabaptists; for he remained an ardent Anabaptist to the end. He helped to organize new communities, and wrote extensively in behalf of his beliefs, his most important treatise being a general dissertation on baptism, the magistracy, the supper and other distinctive Anabaptist doctrines, written in 1542. It was in reply to this book that Schwenkfeld wrote his *Judicium* which led to a series of controversies, in which neither did himself credit. According to Butzer, Marbeck and his wife were "pious people living a blameless life." "But," adds Butzer, "that is just the decoy bird with which Satan even in the days of the Apostles allured the innocent to their death." In 1532 after a public debate with Butzer, Marbeck was banished from Strassburg by order of the city council. He went to Ulm; and from this time until his death in 1556, he remained the guiding spirit among the scattered Anabaptist communities all along the valley of the upper Neckar. He was one of the very few of the pioneer leaders to escape martyrdom.

Melchior Hoffman visited Strassburg long enough in 1529 to gain some followers for his unusual views; but since his chief field of labor was confined to the regions along the Lower Rhine, the story of his activities is told in a later section of this chapter.

Casper Schwenkfeld and Sebastian Franck, two other well-known Strassburg dissenters, and tolerant of other



religious views, were in thorough agreement in many points with the Anabaptists; but they never affiliated with the latter, and cannot be classed as such.

Among other cities in which Anabaptism struck its roots early was Nürnberg, a quaint old center of learning, full of evangelical life, with its school of heretical painters under the famous Albrecht Dürer. It was here that Denk lived before he became a member of the party, and where he met many of his faith afterwards.

Regensburg also harbored a congregation by 1527. Hetzer, Hut, Denk, and Hubmaier all made this a frequent stopping place during the few years of their active service. This city, too, followed a rather mild policy toward dissenters; much milder than the surrounding regions which were directly under the rule of the Bavarian duke.

In fact in all the cities of South Germany—Ulm, Munich, Stuttgart, Passau, wherever the impulses of the Reformation were felt, and in some places where they were not—Anabaptist groups were likely to appear and flourish for a time when the movement was at its peak.

## MIDDLE GERMANY

There was a vigorous growth of the new doctrines in middle Germany, too, in the general region of Fulda, Erfurt, Halberstadt and Mühlhausen,—in *Hesse*, *Franconia*, *Saxony* and *Thuringia*. These were the regions where the Zwickau prophets labored, and where the Peasants' Revolt broke out in 1524, and collapsed so ingloriously the following year. It was perhaps for this reason largely that the Anabaptist movement here developed a character of its own, somewhat apart from that of other localities already mentioned. It was tinged much

more than elsewhere with a spirit of millenarianism. Although quite orthodox and sound on such fundamental doctrines as believer's baptism, non-resistance, non-participation in government, and insistence upon living a life of strict piety and sobriety, the Anabaptists here were much more keenly expectant than were their more sober-minded brethren in other parts of the early inauguration of the kingdom of the elect through some great cataclysm. This chiliastic tone of the movement in middle Germany was no doubt partly due to the lingering influence in this area of Thomas Münzer and his followers, but also in no small degree to the unhealthy millennarian ideas of a new leader, Hans Hut, who for a time had this part of Germany largely to himself as a field of labor.

### **The Zwickau Prophets**

Thomas Münzer, born about 1490, was a restless, fiery spirit who had taken up the work of reform even before Luther, having formed a conspiracy against the bishop of Magdeburg in 1513. After some years of wandering, he settled down at Zwickau as a Lutheran pastor with the full approval of Luther himself. It was here that he met Storch with whom he began an attack upon the avarice and corruption of the monks and priests, ending with a denunciation of many of the practises of the new as well as the old church. The result was exile for both of them. Two years later Münzer turned up at Alstaedt where he gathered together a large congregation before whom he denounced both state churches as well as the temporal government; and began a crusade against pictures, statues, altars and even church buildings on the plea that they were not necessary for true worship. He, too, was a follower of the inner light. "One might read ten thousand Bibles" he said, "and yet it would not help him." He believed himself to be God's special prophet,

and like many of the enthusiasts of his day, he pretended to make the primitive church, together with certain teachings of the Old Testament, the basis of his new system. Infant baptism he rejected as useless, though he never practised rebaptism.

With his radical religious views he preached revolutionary political doctrines. The present governments he said must soon be destroyed,

Those princes who would not repent and would not accept the Gospel must even as the Catholic ecclesiastics be destroyed with fire and sword. They stand not only against the true faith, but also against the natural rights of man. Consequently they must be strangled like dogs.

Rulers must govern for the good of the people, and are accountable to them, he said. He seemed to favor communism, and a levelling of all class distinctions. As a result of these views Münzer was exiled from Alstaedt by Duke George of Saxony, never to return. For a time he hovered about Mühlhausen and other points in South Germany, and finally in 1524, as already noted, he made a tour through northern Switzerland, coming into brief contact with Hubmaier and perhaps several other leaders of the liberal reform movement. He warmly sympathized with the peasants of these regions in their fight against the economic and social burdens to which the church and the land tenure systems of the time subjected them; and when the Peasants' Revolt broke out in South Germany, Münzer became one of the leaders of the movement. He was captured in the battle of Frankenhausen with a number of others and was shortly afterward executed.

That the Zwickau prophets were not Anabaptists, especially not of the peaceful, non-resistant Swiss Brethren type, is apparent, and needs no further proof than a mere recital of their violent, revolutionary political as

well as religious views. Of spiritual kinship there was none between the two parties, and they should not be confused.

## Hans Hut

Hans Hut, a native Franconian, and sacristan to the Knight Hans von Bibra, first attracted local attention when, about the time of the agitation by the Zwickau prophets, he was imprisoned for refusing to baptize his child. We next hear of him in Nürnberg, where he learned the trade of bookbinder. He evidently was interested quite early in religious questions, and became a sort of colporteur; for, when captured with other peasants after the battle of Frankenhausen, he secured his release on the plea that he had accompanied the band of armed peasants not as a fighter but as a bookseller. The Nürnberg Council several years later, in describing him to the court officials who were on his trail, speaks of him as a book peddler "in person a tall, lean, boorish sort of fellow, with a little pale, yellow beard, and a closely-cropped head. His clothes consist of a grey riding jacket, and sometimes black, and a wide-brimmed grey hat."

He soon added the profession of a sort of lay preacher to that of bookseller, and went about preaching the gospel as he understood it. He labored without salary, supporting himself by his book trade and carpentering. He was a man without education in the schools, but thoroughly familiar with the text of the Bible. Like many of the ignorant teachers of his day, he was especially fascinated with the prophecies of Daniel and the ecstatic visions of Revelation. He shared with Münzer the belief in an early coming of the millennium. Every detail in the inauguration of the cataclysmic kingdom was

carefully worked out by him. In one of his tracts published on the subject he says—

shortly before the end of the age, all the godless will be destroyed, and that by true Christians; if the number of Christians shall be sufficient, they will go from Germany to Switzerland, or Hungary. They will pay no attention to lords and princes. When some thousands of them shall have assembled they shall exchange their goods for money so that they may have enough of food; then, they shall wait until the Turk comes. If the Turk fails to destroy the princes, monks, priests, nobles and knights they then will be stricken down by the little company of true Christians. But if the godless shall march against the Turks, then the true Christians shall remain at home, but if many of the princes and lords remain at home too, and do not march against the Turks, they shall be struck down a short time afterwards. Then it will come to pass that the true Christians will have no one but God alone, who will then be and remain their lord.

This near justification by Hut of the use of force by the Christians themselves in helping to usher in the kingdom of the elect was full of danger to the whole Anabaptist cause. Hut himself was not a revolutionist so far as is known, and took no part in any attempt at violence. He still hoped that the Turk would relieve the Christians of the necessity of preparing the world for the elect by the destruction of the wicked. But his teaching that in case the Turks failed, then the Christians themselves might undertake the task at the appointed time, led to disastrous consequences later on when under more radical leaders the conviction dawned upon them that this appointed time for participation had actually arrived.

This fear of the Turk, by the way, played an important role, not only in the apocalyptic ideals of the Anabaptists of middle and northwestern Germany, but in the whole Reformation movement as well. The belief in the early coming of Christ on the earth was by no means confined



to the fanatics of the time. Luther himself held that view. And it was not strange that the Turks should be regarded as the probable means of ushering in the new era; for the Turkish fear was a real fear throughout middle Europe during these times. For years they had been hovering on the eastern frontier threatening to destroy Christian Europe, and in 1529 and several times later had actually laid siege to Vienna. In fact it was the necessity of keeping back the Turks that accounted for Emperor Charles' inability to suppress the Lutheran movement during the lifetime of Luther himself, the most critical years of its history.

All of these radical views of Hut had been well developed while he was still a Lutheran; for he did not become an Anabaptist, as noted elsewhere, until the summer of 1526. Unfortunately his baptism seemingly did not greatly modify his millennarian theories, though his contact with the mild-spirited Denk at Augsburg, and the conservative Hubmaier at Nikolsburg during the following year, had a sobering influence upon him. He was destined to serve his adopted faith for hardly more than a year. But that brief period was packed full of hectic activity and devoted service. He was a fiery, eloquent speaker, especially popular with the laboring men; and travelled extensively and continually as an itinerant preacher, baptizing many throughout Tyrol, Austria, Moravia, where he clashed with Hubmaier, and was imprisoned by a fellow Anabaptist, Leonhard von Liechtenstein, and finally through middle Germany where he baptized converts by the hundreds, and where, as we saw, he was the outstanding and almost sole leader of the entire movement for that brief period. He almost literally baptized on the run evidently. Many of his converts hardly remembered his name. While the reluctance which these often showed when hailed before court tri-

bunals to give testimony to their faith, to remember their baptizer by any other name than merely "Hans," may have been due to the desire to shield him from the authorities, yet it is entirely likely that they had never known him by any other. Often the restless preacher would come into a house under cover of night, deliver his message, perhaps baptize the whole household on the spur of the moment, and before morning leave for parts unknown seeking refuge and other converts, hardly leaving behind him even his full name.

Hut was present at the Martyrs' Synod in Augsburg in 1527, where he was induced to renounce some of his radical theories. But it was already too late for him to undo the damage he had done to the cause; for soon after this he was cast into prison in this city, and was accidentally burned to death in his prison cell.

Among other influential leaders besides Hans Hut, all of whom played a minor role here, however, must be mentioned Melchior Rink, sometimes confused by contemporary writers with Melchior Hoffman, Hans Romer, and Christopher Kürschner.

### **Chiliastic Tendencies**

Under such leadership it is small wonder that the whole Anabaptist movement of middle Germany was permeated with a strong chiliastic spirit. Most of the Anabaptists believed with Hut that the wicked would be destroyed and the new era would be ushered in by an overwhelming victory of the Turks over the armies of the worldly forces. Nürnberg, it was quite generally agreed, would be the scene of the final battle. Not all, however, were convinced that the Turks would be the chosen agents for ending the old order. One man at least, whose beliefs were tested at an inquisitorial court, drawing heavily no doubt from the history of the Israel-

ites, gave it as his opinion that the old dispensation would be wound up by a plague of grasshoppers.

That many of the Anabaptists of this region were not unfamiliar with the arguments used by both the peasants of Germany and those of other countries in their struggle against economic oppression is shown by the fact that they knew the literature of that struggle. More than once a victim of the inquisitorial courts in the course of the trial was heard to quote the couplet well known among the English peasants in their revolts in the thirteenth century—

*Da Adam reute und Eva span  
Wer war die Zeit ein Edelmann.*

Thanks to the researches of Dr. Wappler in this particular field of history, it is possible to reproduce many of the details of the distinctive religious practises common among the Anabaptists of this area. Like their brethren generally in other sections, they stressed sobriety and simplicity in all the activities of life, disapproving especially of excessive eating and drinking, dancing, gambling, and all forms of riotous living. Their clothes were plain and simple, usually of a dark and somber color. True to their non-resistant principles, they substituted for the sword usually worn on public occasions, a short wooden staff, similar to that worn by the Swiss Brethren. This often served as a special mark of identification by which their enemies singled them out in times of persecution. A common password among them was their usual form of greeting—*Der Friede des Herrn sei mit Dir* or *Gott gruesz Dich in dem Herrn*, and the rejoinder *Ich danke Dir in dem Herrn* or simply *Amen*.

In their religious practises they retained some of undoubted Catholic origin, unconsciously perhaps. In administering the act of baptism the form of a cross was

often made on the forehead of the candidate, as the one who administered the rite uttered the formula "in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." For a reason not known, the phrase in the Lord's prayer "Give us our daily bread" was generally replaced by *das wahrhaftige Brot, dein ewiges Wort gib uns heute*. They addressed each other as brother and sister, applying these terms to one another irrespective of relationship—brother, sister, father, mother, son or daughter; often they spoke of themselves as the "Beloved of God."

### Did Not Escape Persecution

The Anabaptists of middle and South Germany, of course, did not escape persecution; although Luther himself was at first slow to sanction any interference on the part of the civil authorities in the realm of spiritual freedom. Fearing, no doubt, the effect of intolerance upon the freedom of his own followers in such states as were still dominantly Catholic, he for a time advocated a spirit of toleration in matters of religious belief almost as broad as that of the Anabaptists themselves. But not long. As the danger to his own followers receded, and his impatience with those who differed with him increased, he grew less inclined to tolerate dissent. By 1527 he still suggested that the civil authority had no right to interfere in matters of religious conviction; but in the same breath invalidated all the benefits that might accrue from this fine spirit by an ingenious interpretation of the right to enforce the law against blasphemy and sedition. Blasphemy he soon interpreted as false teaching; and false teaching was any teaching contrary to the doctrines of Lutheranism. By 1530 he no longer needed to indulge in even this sort of casuistry. He was ready to admit that Anabaptism must be destroyed, and was willing to try any means, no matter how drastic, necessary to accomplish

that end. Most of the other Lutheran theologians followed him in this policy.

But if the theologians were a bit slow in making up their minds to use extreme measures, the temporal authorities were not. Almost from the start in most of the lay as well as ecclesiastical states of middle Europe the Anabaptists were made to feel the iron hand of persecution. The imperial edict issued at the Diet of Speyer on April 23, 1529 ordering all Anabaptists, men and women, in all the states of the empire to be destroyed with fire and sword has already been mentioned.

Among the local rulers who practised unusually harsh measures was the elector of Saxony, in Luther's own state, who not only put men and women to death for their faith in his own duchy but urgently insisted that his neighboring princes do likewise. The Catholic princes were the most relentless of all. In the Swabian League four companies of horsemen of one hundred each scoured the territory under their jurisdiction, literally driving the Anabaptists out of the land. The duke of Bavaria reached the limit of perfidy and cruelty perhaps in the cold-blooded order that such as recanted were to be beheaded, while those who did not were to be burned at the stake. Only Philip of Hesse, of the Reformed party, refused to take extreme measures. In spite of the pressure brought to bear upon him by the elector of Saxony and the edict of Speier, he could still boast in 1530 that up to that time he had not yet put any one to death in his duchy because of his religious faith. The count of the Palatinate, too, Ludwig V, although a Catholic, up to the time of the Diet of Speyer refused to resort to harsh means; but later rulers followed the intolerant spirit of the day.

Anabaptism died hard. The Brethren stuck to their faith tenaciously; in Thuringia the count of Henneberg complained that "neither Godly Scripture, nor sound



Godly warning, nor pain has any effect on them." In the Palatinate the count of Alzey asked "What shall I do? the more I condemn and execute, the more they increase."

But the small scattered groups of peace loving non-resistants, whose only wish was to be let alone, and to worship God in their own way, refusing to attend the state churches, were no match for the organized forces of both state and church urged on by a relentless hatred of religious nonconformity, and fear of political anarchy. Persecuting zeal grew from year to year until by 1535 such Anabaptists as were left in middle and southern Germany were relegated to the obscure outlying districts.

## TYROL AND THE AUSTRIAS

The Anabaptist movement confined itself in the south to the German-speaking sections of the empire. Missionaries and refugees from Switzerland early found their way to the east across Voralberg into Tyrol and the Austrias, along the Inn and the Danube as far as Vienna. Large Anabaptist centers were formed at Landeck, Innsbruck, and Kitzbühel along the upper Inn; at Passau where the Inn enters the Danube; and at Steyr, Linz, and other towns farther down the Danube. Following the trade routes through the famous Brenner Pass, flourishing congregations were established around Sterzing on the north side of the pass, and others on the south side along the valleys of the Eisack, Puster, and Etch which combine in southern Tyrol to form the Adige in Italy.

In the Tyrolean valleys alone, it was said that by 1529, Anabaptists were found in one hundred twenty localities. Just when they first appeared here is not definitely known, but likely soon after the dispersion at Zurich in 1525. Georg Zaunring, arrested in 1528, said that he had baptized many along the Inn. Matthias Langer, the following

year claimed one hundred converts. Georg Blaurock was burned at the stake September 6, 1529. Succeeding Blaurock as leader of the Tyroleans was Jacob Hutter, a hatter, native of the Puster Valley, who this same year was sent by his persecuted brethren to Moravia to investigate the advisability of a wholesale migration to that land of promise. Pilgram Marbeck had left for Strassburg before the heaviest persecution had set in.

Scattered groups were found in the accessible valleys of all the neighboring Habsburg provinces, Upper and Lower Austria, Salzburg, Carinthia and Styria. But our knowledge of the Anabaptists of these regions is rather meager, largely, no doubt, because students of their history have not yet taken the trouble to study the archives here with the same zeal shown in the case of Tyrol and Moravia. It is known, however, that Hans Hut during his short meteoric career, in 1527, spent some time in these sections, greatly influencing the whole movement. At Steier he sent out a number of missionaries.

In all the Habsburg lands, which remained solidly Catholic, where Anabaptists appeared persecution was inaugurated almost from the beginning. Ferdinand, the brother of Emperor Charles, was charged with the task of protecting the crown lands against both the Turks from without, and all the dissenters within. The second task he performed well. The first victim was executed at Rottenburg on the Inn, January 4, 1528. His name was Leonhard Schiemer. One of the hymns in the *Ausbund*, number 31, is accredited to him, three stanzas of which go as follows,—

*Thine holy place they have destroyed,  
Thine altar overthrown  
And, reaching forth their bloody hands  
Have foully slain Thine own;*

*And we alone, a little flock,  
The few who still remain,  
Are exiles wandering through the land  
In sorrow and in pain.*

*We are, alas, like scattered sheep,  
The shepherd out of sight,  
Each far away from home and hearth  
And, like the birds of night  
That hide away; in rocky clefts  
We have our rocky hold,  
Yet near at hand, as for the birds,  
There waits the hunter bold.*

*We wander in the forests dark  
With dogs upon our track  
And, like the captive, silent lamb,  
Men bring us, prisoners, back.  
They point to us amid the throng  
And with their taunts offend,  
And long to let the sharpened ax  
On heretics descend.*

Schiemer was followed by hundreds of others. In Kitzbühel, a town in the archbishopric of Salzburg, during this same year two hundred Anabaptist prisoners were reported. The next year in the same district fifty children were made orphans by the execution of their parents. No stone was left unturned by the Catholic rulers to completely root out the Anabaptist faith. Special state police were organized to search out heretics. The houses of the victims were burned down; they were sent to the galleys; beheaded, drowned and burned at the stake. Even prospective mothers were given a respite, when condemned for their faith, only until their children were born, after which the children were turned over to orthodox Catholic orphanages, and mothers thrown into the river or burned at the stake. Most despicable of all was the sending out of secret service agents, who, preying

upon the simple faith of the unsuspecting Brethren, were urged by the ruling authorities to pretend conversion, submit to baptism, learn the names of their brethren in the faith, then betray them to the authorities.

Under such determined efforts to root out their faith the Anabaptists were soon driven out of the larger centers and into the out-of-the-way places. Many left for Moravia. Although driven under cover, the faith was not entirely extirpated. But persecution continued throughout the entire century.

## MORAVIA

In pleasing contrast to the common experiences of the Anabaptists elsewhere, was the welcome they received for a few years in southern Moravia. There were several reasons why Moravia at this particular time could offer an asylum to the persecuted sects from other regions. It was ruled by a *Markgraf* who was a vassal to the king of Bohemia. During the struggle between rival claimants to the Bohemian throne, many of the vassals of the kingdom had virtually managed their own affairs with little interference from above. In 1526 the crown fell to the lot of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria. Although the archduke was wont to rule his possessions with an iron hand, yet he did not dare to encroach too early upon the liberties of the powerful Moravian nobility. And so, these were left for some years with their former autonomous rights. Many of the Moravian noblemen had been sympathetic, for both economic and religious reasons, toward the dissenting sects. Owing to numerous civil wars, population had been greatly reduced in regions, and big estates devastated and made unprofitable. And so, Anabaptists, who were known to be good farmers were often welcomed for economic reasons with-

in the domains of local noblemen, in spite of kingly and imperial edicts to the contrary.

Among the liberal-minded noblemen in southern Moravia were the barons von Liechtenstein, Johann and Leonhard, two brothers, whose seat of government was the ancient city of Nikolsburg, near the Austrian border. Anabaptist refugees must have come here quite early; but we know little of them before the coming in July, 1526, of Hubmaier.

### **Balthasar Hubmaier**

Dr. Balthasar Hubmaier, whom we remember as one of the early agitators against infant baptism in Switzerland, was one of the most learned as well as most conservative of Anabaptist leaders. Born about 1480, near Augsburg, a university graduate, and later a university professor in Ingoldstadt, he became an eloquent preacher of Catholic doctrines, both in the cathedral church in Regensburg, and later in Waldshut, the latter an Austrian town just across the Swiss border. His connection with both Zwingli and the opponents of infant baptism in Zurich has been mentioned elsewhere. He joined the Swiss Brethren in the spring of 1525, being baptized by Reublin; and after this devoted himself wholeheartedly to the Anabaptist cause. He was immediately marked for destruction by Archduke Ferdinand, who ordered the town of Waldshut to surrender him. But Hubmaier having become popular, and having secured a large following, the town authorities refused to turn him over to the archduke. The town, besieged soon after surrendered to the Austrian troops. But Hubmaier, in the meantime, had fled from the city, unfortunately for himself, to Zurich, where, as an Anabaptist, he was also an outlaw. Here, together with a number of others, he was impris-



oned, but upon a partial recantation, and a promise to leave the city he was released. After a short stay in Constance, and a brief period of activity in Augsburg, where as we have seen he baptized Hans Denk, he arrived at Nikolsburg in July 1526, where for one brief year he exercised a dominating influence over the rapidly growing Anabaptist movement at that place, if indeed he was not the actual founder of it.

### **Rapid Growth**

Anabaptism here grew by leaps and bounds, capturing both the leading Lutheran preachers of the city, Oswald Glaidt, and Hans Spitalmaier, as well as the barons von Liechtenstein. Following the example of both their spiritual leaders and their temporal rulers, the people flocked to the new faith by the thousands. In fact Anabaptism practically became the state church. It is said that by the close of the first year it numbered some six thousand; some say double that number. It is likely that the former is more nearly correct. How much of this growth was due to the efforts of Hubmaier is not known, but it is likely that he was ably assisted by other leaders. How many of the adherents were natives, and how many were refugees also is a matter of conjecture, though the latter undoubtedly were far in the minority. Among the Swiss refugees, though never quite a full-fledged Anabaptist, was the Zurich publisher, Christopher Froschauer, founder of a well-known Zurich printing firm, and publisher during the sixteenth century of numerous editions of the famous Froschauer Bible, in the quaint Swiss dialect, and in general use among the Swiss Anabaptist for the next three centuries. Froschauer set up a printing establishment in Nikolsburg, in which Hubmaier had published during the year no less than fifteen separate pamphlets, mostly on some phase of the

baptism question; and all dedicated to various liberal-minded noblemen of Moravia.

Perhaps an added cause of the rapid spread of Anabaptism in southern Moravia is to be found in the half-way measures adopted here. In fact it is a question whether strictly speaking the religious faith of Hubmaier and that of the Liechtensteins ought to be spoken of as Anabaptist at all. Especially if that term is to be confined to the type of Anabaptism whose lineage we are following in this chapter—the non-resistant type of the Swiss Brethren.

To be sure, the so-called Moravian Anabaptists were separatists, and they advocated and practised religious toleration within certain limits. They rejected infant baptism and practised adult baptism upon confession of faith. But on the question of the relation of church to state they differed quite materially from the other Anabaptists. They did not advocate nor practise non-resistance, a fundamental doctrine of the faith as taught by Grebel, Blaurock, Denk, Sattler, and even to a limited extent by Hut and Hoffman. Hubmaier in his treatise *On the Sword* taught that the Christian might use the sword and go to war on certain occasions; and that it was permitted him to be a magistrate, although no magistrate should use his power to enforce religious conformity. Baron von Liechtenstein even violated this doctrine, however, when with the apparent consent of Hubmaier he imprisoned Hut, a fellow Anabaptist, because of a religious difference. The Liechtensteins might have justified their action on the ground that it was impossible to maintain a stable order without the use of force. And it is undoubtedly true that non-resistant Anabaptism and temporal government are incompatible terms in a sinful world. Hubmaier was no longer of the Swiss Brethren.

## Factional Disputes

Unfortunately, the same spirit of freedom which in the domain of the Liechtensteins guaranteed the greatest degree of religious toleration, also afforded ample opportunity for the development of those petty factional quarrels which found their birth so readily in the extreme individualism of the Anabaptist movement. Moravian Anabaptism evidently did not grow its rarest flowers in an atmosphere of too much freedom. It was at its worst just here where it should have been at its best.

The first cleavage appeared between the native Lutheran converts to Anabaptism under the leadership of Hubmaier, and the Swiss and Tyrolean refugees under the leadership of Hans Hut, who in the meantime, had also come to Nikolsburg in the fall of 1526, and Jacob Wiedeman, "one eyed Jacob" as he was called for obvious reasons, a native Bavarian, who had arrived at about the same time. Both Hut and Wiedeman strenuously opposed Hubmaier's half-way measures. No Christian can be a magistrate they said; neither can he take up the sword except, as Hut suggested, at the specific command of the Lord at the proper time, to help the Turk usher in the millennium. War taxes, too, Wiedeman called "blood money." As a result of this controversy Hut found himself in prison, from whence he soon escaped, however, and betook himself to Augsburg, where during the fall of 1527, he met his death.

Hubmaier, too, disappears from the Moravian stage of activity in the summer of the same year. Ever since his radical activities at Waldshut he had been closely watched by the archduke of Austria. First at Waldshut, then at Zurich, and now again at Nikolsburg, Ferdinand demanded that he be turned over to the Austrian author-

ities for punishment. Baron von Liechtenstein was none too reluctant, as it seems to us now, to turn over a fellow Anabaptist to what he knew would be sure death. Likely he could not help himself. Hubmaier and his wife were both imprisoned in Vienna, where on March 10, 1528, he was burned at the stake; and a few days later his devoted wife with a stone tied about her neck was tossed into the Danube.

Hubmaier was not made of heroic clay. Sensitive to physical pain, shrinking from torture, he thrice had recanted during his brief career. In his last imprisonment he hoped against hope that he might be able to satisfy his persecutors with a compromise. He was never able, however, to entirely smother his deep-seated religious convictions. When he saw that his enemies were bent on his destruction unless he made a complete denial of his faith as an Anabaptist, he showed a fine spirit of Christian resignation. As his executioners rubbed gunpowder and sulphur into his beard and hair to hasten his death, he appealed to the bystanders "O dear brothers, pray God that He will forgive my guilt in this my death. I will die in the Christian faith." As the flames approached to consume him, and his beard caught fire he called out in a loud voice "O my Heavenly Father, O my gracious God."

Among modern Baptist historians Hubmaier is regarded as the greatest of the Anabaptists. This is no doubt largely due to his numerous writings on the practise of baptism itself, a rite looming large in modern Baptist theology; and further to the fact that by his denial of the doctrine of non-resistance and his defence of the magistracy he accords more nearly with the views of modern Baptists than do the other Anabaptists of that day. But if judged by the prevailing views of the majority of his fellow laborers, and especially by the influ-

ence he exerted upon the further growth of the movement, Hubmaier can hardly be accorded this distinction. He differed from nearly all his brethren outside of Nikolsburg on one of the most fundamental doctrines of the faith. His type of Anabaptism died with him, soon after disappearing even from Moravia; and that of the Swiss Brethren only survived to later times. Neither was the rise of the later English Baptist movement in any way to be traced to Hubmaier; the English Baptists at that time had never heard of him. Their first contact with the continental successors to Anabaptism was with the non-resistant Mennonites of Amsterdam, a century after the death of Hubmaier. His greatness is measured by Baptist historians not by his influence upon the movement of his day, but rather by his agreement with Baptist views of the present.

The troubles in the Nikolsburg church did not cease with the disappearance of Hut and Hubmaier. Wiedeman continued his dispute with Hubmaier's successor, Hans Spitalmaier, in behalf of the Swiss type of the faith. But to the old subject of controversy a new one now was added—*communism*, which was not practised among the Swiss. The demand that all goods be held in common, no doubt, resulted from the necessities of the poverty stricken refugees who continually found their way into the barony. Caring for these refugees was a heavy burden on the native Anabaptists. Early in the spring of 1527, Wiedeman complained that the native church "does not give shelter to the pilgrims and refugees from other countries." Soon natives and exiles had separate meetings. The larger group, faithful to the teaching of Hubmaier on the sword, and mostly natives, were known as *Schwertler* (the party of the sword); while Wiedeman's smaller party, mostly exiles with Swiss views were known as *Stäbler* (the party of the staff).



## The Beginning of the Community of Goods

But Baron von Liechtenstein would permit no division within the ranks of his church. He informed Wiedeman that if he could not conform to the will of the majority he would have to leave. With a small group of about two hundred, Wiedeman chose the latter alternative. Now was an opportune time to adopt the communistic practise. On their outward journey, the party stopped just beyond the city walls, where, electing a "minister of temporal needs" they

laid down their cloaks, and every man threw down on it entirely of his own accord without compulsion, his earthly possessions according to the teachings of the prophets and apostles for the benefit of the needy.

Although Léonhard von Liechtenstein forced the issue which resulted in the exile of the little flock of *Stäbler* and communists, he evidently bore them no ill will; for he accompanied them to the borders of his own barony, where he dismissed them with his blessing, drinking to their health and bidding them God speed. At the border the little party was fortunate in being met by another set of noblemen, the barons von Kaunitz, who were as glad to receive the exiles on their devastated estates near Austerlitz as the Liechtensteins were loath to see them go. "If there were a thousand of them" said one of the Kaunitz brothers, "we would gladly receive them."

The Austerlitz settlement was founded on a strictly communistic basis. The whole community lived as one family in a group called a *Household* (*Brudershof*). Believing to have found here the promised land, they soon sent out messengers to their persecuted brethren in the Palatinate, Swabia, Bavaria, Hesse, and especially Tyrol, urging all of them to come to Moravia where they would be welcome. Many came, including among others such lead-

ers as Wilhelm Reublin, prominent in the Swiss beginnings a few years before, and Georg Zaunring with a number of Tyrolean followers. Soon additional Households had to be established at Znaim, Brünn, Eibenschitz, and Schaeckowitz, all near by. At Rossitz a large community was founded by Gabriel Ascherham with his following from Silesia, which in a short time mounted up to twelve hundred members; to these latter was added also about this time a company of some five hundred Swabians under the leadership of Philip Blauaermel.

It would have been strange indeed if these different groups, coming as they did from various sections of middle Europe with differing customs and practises under their own strong-minded leaders, should not have had some difficulty under the stress of communistic control in harmonizing their conflicting views. In Austerlitz especially, the original Household, where "One eyed Jacob" exercised a rather arbitrary and rigid discipline, and where he guarded jealously his ministerial authority against all newcomers there soon developed a rather unlovely controversy among both leaders and laymen. The old question of the relation of the state to the church evidently was not entirely settled by leaving Nikolsburg. Some of the Austerlitzer, citing the example of Jesus at Capernaum, insisted that the brethren should assume all the burdens of citizenship like the other inhabitants of the land; others declared this to be impossible under the non-resistant faith. Their duty was merely to obey and pray for the authorities over them.

The strict enforcement, too, by Jacob of the communistic regulations became extremely distasteful to many who had come from congregations where communism was unknown. Even in his own original flock he found some difficulty in securing implicit obedience. His attempt to secure husbands for the marriageable sisters

especially was resented by the latter. The sisters also complained that their taskmaster gave them difficult scripture lessons to memorize which in case of failure greatly humiliated them. Some evidently did not share their all. These went to the markets, it was said, and buying what they pleased, brought discontent to the others. Some complained because housing quarters were crowded. The Tyroleans thought the order of worship was not as good as theirs at home, and that there was much laxness in the bringing up of the children.

The leaders seemingly had the most difficult time of all in getting on together. In the words of an old chronicler,

In the meantime it came about, since the devil never remains at rest, but is continually going about within the house of the Lord like a roaring lion seeking on all sides to sow discord and destroy the unity of the Spirit, and that which is Godly, he struck at the most vital point, namely the elders, since the life of the whole people leans upon them as the holy Judith says in her book.

These differences came to a head one day in 1530, when Reublin, who was an ordained minister, began to expound the Scriptures during the absence of Wiedeman, for which he was severely reprimanded by the latter upon his return. Zaunring, the Tyrolean, also a minister, whose gift was not recognized by "One eyed Jacob," sided in with Reublin and his fellows. As a result, about one hundred and fifty members under the leadership of these two left for the neighboring district, Auspitz, where on convent lands given them by the Abbess of Brünn they established a separate Household.

In the meantime Gabriel Ascherham and Philip Blauaermel had fallen out with one another at Rossitz. Philip also led his faction to Auspitz. These two groups came to be known in the records of the period as *Gabrielists* and *Philipists*.

## Jacob Hutter

It is needless to suggest that these various religious controversies seriously impaired the spiritual health of the whole Moravian Anabaptist community. Some of the more devoted adherents of the faith among all the different groups, realizing the seriousness of the situation appealed to their Tyrolean brethren for an impartial arbitrator who might help them heal their troubles. The Tyroleans, in 1531, sent them a minister who had already been in Moravia two years before, and one who was to play an important role among them for a few years—Jacob Hutter.

Whether Hutter advocated community of goods while in Tyrol, is not known, but at the time of his first visit to Moravia in 1529 he had freely associated with the elders of the communistic congregation at Austerlitz and found himself as of "one heart and mind" with them, "in the fear and service of the Lord." Upon his return to his native land his enthusiastic report of the freedom enjoyed in Moravia sent many of his oppressed brethren to that land of promise. Most of these, no doubt, affiliated themselves with the Austerlitz communists. Hutter himself remained to direct the work in Tyrol. How he succeeded as peacemaker between the congregations at Auspitz and Austerlitz on the occasion of his second visit in 1531 we do not know. But when he returned in 1533 to Auspitz to make that his permanent home he came "not as to strangers" he said, "but as to dear brethren"; and according to an old chronicler, "bringing with him to the common treasury a temporal gift, a sweet offering, yes a little saving so that the loan which the Abbess of Brünn had made them could be paid off." Here Hutter was invited by his many admirers to assume equal pastoral duties with others, although each Household was already well

supplied with native pastors, a suggestion which he was not slow to act upon.

Jacob Hutter evidently was a man of a strong and aggressive personality, and a strict disciplinarian. Most of the other ministers were soon lined up against him. But having won the confidence of a majority of the members in the various congregations, he was able to discipline his fellow ministers with a ruthless hand. Especially insistent was he upon a rigid enforcement of the rule of communism. The controversy was not always carried on in the spirit of Christian humility befitting fellow sufferers for the faith. Uncomplimentary adjectives, and what today at least would be regarded as unnecessarily harsh epithets were hurled back and forth without the least compunction. The Philipists were most bitter against the friends of Hutter, and the latter found fault with almost all the others. Poor Wilhelm Reublin, who was such a credit to the early Swiss movement, now charged with reserving twenty-four gulden of his own private money from the common treasury in a time of sickness, was cast out as a "faithless, lying, malicious Ananias." Philip Blaauermel was also excommunicated by Hutter as a "liar" for saying that the people were worshipping the latter as an idol; Bohemian David was expelled because, when he departed from Austerlitz he engaged a company of soldiers to accompany him; Zaunring for taking back his wife, who had been charged with adultery; and Schuetzinger, Hutter's co-laborer in his earlier visits to Moravia, for deceit. Some of these upon proper confession of their sins were permitted to return to the fold. Reublin completely disappeared from Anabaptist history at this point.

So completely did strong armed Jacob Hutter dominate the whole Moravian situation that, according to the chronicler of these events all the survivors of the church



are called "*Hutterisch*" to this day. Since this term "*Hutterisch*" has never been officially turned into English, the people who followed the teaching of Jacob Hutter shall here be called *Hutterites*, perhaps as good a rendering of the term as any other. That all these other ministers were rabid sinners, and Jacob alone a saint is not likely. The chronicler from whom these facts are learned, the only source of information on this subject, himself a member of the group called "*Hutterisch*," no doubt was unduly prejudiced in favor of his hero. But be that as it may, the fact remains that all the other factions of the Moravian Anabaptist faith ultimately disappeared, and only the Hutterites survived the stress of the times. A small handful of these survivors driven out of their native land, set their faces toward the east. Their children's children in the course of the next two centuries found their way finally by way of Hungary and Wallachia to Russia; and ultimately during the latter part of the last century such of their descendents as still claimed the faith found a final refuge on the prairies of our own Dakotas and Canada.

As just suggested, the freedom from outside interference in affairs of religion enjoyed by the Moravian Anabaptists was too good to last. King Ferdinand, who had always hated them as "more dangerous than murderers, and enemies of the land," and who had withheld the iron hand of persecution only because of fear of the powerful noblemen in his newly acquired kingdom, had by 1532 evidently won sufficient influence over these noblemen to venture upon an aggressive policy of persecution. At any rate in the above year, he succeeded in forcing through the Moravian *Landtag*, held at Znaim, an edict banishing all Anabaptists and Jews from the land. The nobles, no matter how highly they might prize the economic worth of their industrious tenants, now had no

recourse but to enforce the order of the king. The Households consequently were broken up, and their occupants driven out into the open fields and under the open sky to seek a living as best they could; the inhabitants everywhere were forbidden under pain of heavy punishment to give these exiles shelter, food or drink. The object evidently was to harry them out of the land as rapidly as possible.

All factions and parties had to go—the *Schwertler* of Nikolsburg, as well as the *Stäbler* of Austerlitz; the *Philipists*, who left with “songs on their lips”; the *Gabrielists*, and the *Hutterisch*. At first the large company tried to keep together, but finding this impossible, they formed into small groups of eight or ten to seek as best they could their sustenance among an unfriendly people. The natives remained for the most part hidden in the forests and hills of their own native Moravian home land, hoping for better times. The foreign refugees, many of them, found their way back to the lands from which they had originally come—the Philipists to Swabia, the Gabrielists to Silesia. Jacob Hutter with “pack on his back” turned his face toward his native Tyrol. Some sixty Swiss Brethren were apprehended near the Bavarian border where they were imprisoned in the castle of Passau. Here they composed during the next few years a group of hymns which later formed the nucleus of the famous old *Ausbund*, the hymn book still in use without a change by the Old Order Amish among the hills of eastern Pennsylvania and the plains of central Kansas.

In vain Hutter pled with the Moravian authorities in behalf of his brethren.

We do not seek to harm or injure any one, he said, not even our worst enemy. Our deeds are an open book, our words public to all. Rather than owe any man a penny we would be robbed of a hundred gulden. Rather than harm

any one with a stroke of the hand, we would lose our lives. Our whole life ambition is to live according to God's truth, and justice in peace and harmony as true followers of Christ. Those who say we have gathered in the open fields by the thousands as if to prepare for war are not telling the truth. If all the world were like-minded all wars would cease, and all unrighteousness would have an end.

But all to no avail. The Households were not restored. The congregations were permanently scattered. The remnants that later gathered together, as noted before were all of the Hutterite faction.

In Tyrol, Jacob Hutter was permitted only a brief period of further labor—all the while at the risk of great personal danger, with a price upon his head, a marked man. In the cellars of the houses of his friends, in the forests, in secret places among the hills, wherever he could do so without inviting detection, he gathered together his brethren and ministered unto them to the end. He was finally apprehended near his birth place, taken to Innsbruck, where he lay in prison for some months; and after undergoing a season of the most cruel torture inflicted upon him by his enemies in the hope that they might secure from him a denial of his faith, and information as to the identity and whereabouts of his brethren, he was burned at the stake in the early spring of 1536, stout hearted and faithful to the very last.

## THE LOWER RHINE

Anabaptism found its way down the Rhine rather slowly. It took several years after its first appearance in Switzerland before there were many traces of it in The Netherlands and northwestern Germany. There may have been small and isolated groups here and there in the cities of the Lowlands somewhat earlier, but there was nothing like an organized effort before the appear-

ance in these regions of Melchior Hoffman about 1529. In fact, the whole movement here is so closely associated in its initial stages with the work of that zealous apostle of the cause that a brief review of his life must necessarily preface any adequate account of the spread of the Anabaptist cause along the Lower Rhine.

### **Melchior Hoffman**

Melchior Hoffman, a Suabian by birth, early in life learned the trade of a tanner. "That good for nothing fellow who dresses hides," Zwingli calls him in 1523. With little formal education, but unusually familiar with the contents of the Bible, and possessed of an eloquent tongue and a vivid imagination, he early became a fiery and popular lay preacher of radical Lutheran principles, for a time with the approval of Luther himself. For several years he travelled continually and extensively along the Baltic Sea coast, on both the German and Swedish sides, with such radical fellow-laborers as Carlstadt, and Melchior Rink, the latter a follower of Thomas Münzer, plying his trade while he preached to large and enthusiastic groups of followers, sometimes with disastrous results, as when in Stockholm he was driven from the city for inaugurating a crusade against the pictures and statues in the city churches. In 1527, he was invited by the king of Denmark to serve as a sort of court preacher at Kiel. Here he established a printing press on which he published many of his numerous tracts explaining his radical views on many of the mysteries of the Scriptures.

Hoffman was especially attracted by the prophecies of the Bible as they appeared in the books of Daniel and Revelation, those most dangerous of all books in the hands of unlettered enthusiasts. Being adept at an alle-

gorical interpretation of the Scriptures, he greatly astonished and attracted the unlearned masses with his supposed insight into divine mysteries. He made much of biblical symbolism; every recurring number, especially the number seven, every occult phrase had a significant meaning for him. Particularly dangerous were his eschatological and chiliastic views. While still in Sweden he taught the people that Christ's kingdom, the kingdom of the elect would soon appear on the earth. By a method of computation all his own, based on both Daniel and Revelation, he calculated that the great cataclysm would take place seven years from that time—in the year 1533. Strassburg was to be the assembling place of the one hundred and forty-four thousand saints which the prophecies foretold would be the number of faithful left on the earth to inaugurate the new Jerusalem.

Like Hut, Hoffman believed that the new era, preceded by a period of great persecution would be ushered in through the agency of the Turks. Two reincarnated messengers, Elijah and Enoch, would appear in due time to clear the way for the great event. One of these, Elijah, was already here in the person of Hoffman himself. Enoch was to follow. Hoffman, it will be observed, did not advocate the use of force in bringing in the new kingdom. Nor did he share the belief of Hut that at a later appointed time the Christian would be justified in participating in bringing about that event. His theories, however, under more fanatical leadership later were no less dangerous than were those of the more militant Hut.

One other peculiar view of Hoffman distinguished him at this particular time from his co-laborers, his theory of the incarnation. According to his view, Jesus at his birth owed nothing of his being to the flesh of Mary. Mary served merely as a medium through which Jesus came into the world, like unto light as it passes through



glass, as later disciples of his put it. The reason back of this unusual explanation of the incarnation in the mind of Hoffman was the necessity of keeping Jesus sin-less. Hoffman could not see how sin-less-ness could emerge from sinful flesh. The only escape was to have Jesus born without either earthly father or mother. The latter view was especially objectionable to the Catholics, since it detracted from the adoration of the Virgin Mary as the mother of Jesus.

Hoffman arrived at his Anabaptist views rather gradually. At first an ardent Lutheran, he soon leaned toward many of the doctrines of Zwingli, especially in the matter of the Lord's Supper; and finally shared with the Anabaptists especially such views as were based on a literal interpretation of the Scriptures, as those on the oath and the magistracy. He became a full-fledged Anabaptist in 1529 when it is thought he was baptized at Strassburg, where he had come in contact with such leaders as Denk, and Hetzer, as well as Sebastian Franck and other liberal theologians who were not of the Anabaptist faith.

He perhaps underwent little change of heart and mind at the time of his baptism except to officially join a group with whom he was already at one; and he seemingly forgot none of his apocalyptic vagaries. For his few remaining years he now became an aggressive and fiery expounder and apostle of Anabaptist views as he understood them, having for his sole field almost the whole of The Netherlands and of northwestern Germany. He left immediately for the city of Emden in East Friesland, where he first introduced adult baptism in these regions. He immediately gained a great following, especially among the common people, and at one time baptized three hundred converts in the great minster itself.

## The Low Countries

The time was ripe in the Low Countries for an aggressive leader of a new evangelical life. Neither Lutheranism nor Zwinglianism had as yet taken strong root here. The evangelical movement, influenced somewhat by earlier dissenting groups, remained unorganized, highly individualistic and leaderless. It was Hoffman's great opportunity, and he was not slow to take advantage of it. From Emden as a center, he spent the next few years of his life in ceaseless missionary activity in behalf of the Anabaptist cause, travelling all over the provinces of northern Holland and East Friesland, preaching and baptizing, and not forgetting to prophesy the inauguration within a few years of the kingdom of the just.

The common people especially heard him gladly; and converts flocked to him by the thousands, among others Jan Volkertszoon Tripmaker, who in turn in 1530 was the first to introduce Anabaptism into Amsterdam. Tripmaker, too, was an enthusiastic apostle of the new cause, meeting his death for his faith the next year at The Hague by beheading. Among the number converted and baptized by the latter were two men, who because of their later connection with Anabaptist history are of interest here, Sicke Freriks, the tailor whose execution at Leeuwarden a little later caused a Witmarsum priest, Menno Simons by name, to study the Bible for an explanation of infant baptism; and Jan Matthys, a Haarlem baker, who preached a chiliastic doctrine more fanatical than Hoffman ever dreamed of, which he tried out a few years later at Münster with such disastrous results. Matthys himself soon became an enthusiastic preacher of the new faith, and an eloquent missionary of the cause, not only travelling extensively but sending out many disciples who carried his own teaching through all northern Holland. Among these were two who visited Fries-

land, Bartholomeus de Boekbinder and Dirk de Kuiper, who baptized at Leeuwarden, two brothers, Obbe and Dirk Philips. The latter two won Menno Simons to the cause.

But neither church nor state approved of the religious movement so enthusiastically promoted by Hoffman and Tripmaker. Many of the converts were sent to prison, and most of the preachers to the executioner's block as rebels and heretics. Hoffman was greatly disappointed and disillusioned by this turn of affairs. Thinking that the favor with which his message was received in Emden, and the toleration granted him there by the authorities to be certain evidence of the approval of Providence on his work and a sure sign that the inauguration of the millennium was now assured, he was puzzled and dismayed by the fierce persecution that now set in against his brethren. Perhaps after all he was mistaken as to the time. But Hoffman was not the kind of man who would long be without biblical justification for a change of tactics if necessary. Finding in the Old Testament that Zerubbabel had one time delayed work on the rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem for a period of two years because of the opposition of the enemy, so he now also ordered his disciples to cease baptizing for an equal period of time to avoid persecution, hoping no doubt that by that time the new kingdom would be established. Preaching, however, continued. His adherents became known as *Melchiorites*.

Melchior Hoffman followed his visions to the end. Influenced by the prophecies of an old man that he, Hoffman, must first be imprisoned in Strassburg, which was now to be the new Jerusalem, for six months preceding the establishing of the kingdom of the saints, he journeyed to that city to be present among the one hundred and forty-four thousand who were to gather there at the ap-

propriate time, the year 1533. The old man's prophecies were fulfilled. Hoffman had no difficulty in getting himself imprisoned; not for six months, of course, but for the rest of his life. Here he died some years later, disillusioned, and ready to admit that the whole thing was but an idle dream.

## MÜNSTER

In the meantime another evangelical movement entirely independent of the one just mentioned was developing in the city of Münster, the seat of a Catholic bishopric in Westphalia. The bishop, an unusually harsh ruler, was decidedly unpopular among his subjects, a fact which greatly encouraged the demand for religious as well as political reform. By 1533, under the leadership of a liberal preacher, Bernhard Rothmann, the city had accepted a radical Lutheran religion. Paralleling this religious movement was one of social democracy, supported by the working men of the city and led by another Bernhard,—Knipperdolling. Religious and social reform were thus closely intertwined here from the first. With the coming of Heinrich Roll, an Anabaptist of the Melchiorite party from Jülich-Cleve, the Münster agitation entered a new phase. Rothmann was persuaded to accept baptism, and many followed his example. Although the Lutheran religious forces in the city stoutly opposed this new development, the labor guilds of the town, attracted more by the social message of the Anabaptist gospel than by that of the Lutherans, enthusiastically supported Rothmann and Roll in their religious efforts.

The Anabaptist movement in Münster up to this time likely remained of the Melchiorite variety, still peaceful and largely non-resistant, and with the exception of the millennarian germ, not particularly to be feared. But with

the coming of Jan Matthys and his disciples in the early spring of 1534, the movement enters a more dangerous phase. Non-resistance now gives way to an aggressive spirit of revolution. And with the passing of the non-resistant spirit, the Anabaptism which we have been following so far in this chapter throughout middle Europe disappears here in Münster in everything but name.

### Jan Matthys

Jan Matthys as we saw, preached a much more militant type of millennarianism than did his teacher, Melchior Hoffman. According to the latter, the Christian's part in the great drama was a passive one—merely to await the coming of the great day; while according to the former the day was already at hand and he, Matthys, was the Enoch prophesied by Hoffman; and it was now the duty of the faithful to take up the sword in behalf of the new kingdom to be established. Münster instead of Strassburg was to be the seat of the new Jerusalem.

Matthys, who had already chafed under Hoffman's order to cease baptizing for two years, now that the latter was a prisoner in Strassburg, took entire control of the Anabaptist movement in these regions, announcing that the time for action had now arrived, and that baptizing might be resumed. Numerous disciples of his were sent throughout the land, broadcasting this news, two of whom as we have just seen entered Münster in January of 1534.

That Matthys did not regard himself as merely the successor to Hoffman, but that he thought himself about to inaugurate an entirely new movement is evidenced by the fact that he insisted on rebaptizing all those who had already been initiated through the rite of adult baptism into the church of Rothmann and Roll, including these two leaders themselves. Within a few days fourteen hundred were added to his group, no doubt embrac-



ing the larger part of those already Anabaptists. His party can no longer be regarded as an Anabaptist party of the type of Sattler and Denk or even of Hoffman. In fact the act of baptism was now a political rather than a religious symbol. Apostles of this Münsterite movement as we shall call it hereafter for want of a better name, were sent out under the personal leadership of Matthys throughout the Low Countries, appearing first among the Melchiorites wherever possible, preaching the new gospel, and inviting all the faithful to gather at Münster to await the ushering in of the new Jerusalem.

In the meantime the bishop of Münster, driven from his charge some time before, alarmed at the turn affairs had taken, and determined to crush all revolt against his authority, gathered a small army among his followers and laid siege to the city. The whole movement entered its final stage when, in April of 1534, Jan Matthys was killed in an attempt to break through the lines, leaving another Jan,—Jan van Leiden in command of the misguided enthusiasts. It was under Leiden's rule of a little more than a year that all the horrible excesses and bloody orgies, which have ever since given the whole Münster affair such an unsavory reputation in Reformation annals took place. That episode, unfortunately, is the best known and in many cases the only known part of the whole so-called Anabaptist movement among church and secular historians. Familiarity with the facts of that unfortunate event can therefore be taken for granted here, and only a few scattered comments are necessary.

While no attempt is made here to justify all that was done in the name of religion by Jan van Leiden, yet even the most disreputable and fanatical practises indulged in by the Münsterites at this time can be explained by the facts of their real situation. They were engaged in a life and death struggle. There was no hope

of escape. Such as tried to break through the lines were taken captive and executed. Every ounce of reserve force would have to be mobilized and conserved against the danger from the outside. There could be no divided loyalty within. Under such a situation terrible things may happen; they did during the Reign of Terror in the French Revolution. During a critical period of the siege all those who wished to take the chances of escape through the lines, were given an opportunity to leave the city; all others were forced to submit to baptism, an act which was no longer of particular religious significance, but merely a covenant cementing together the entire body as a single unit in its resolve to fight together to the last ditch, a sort of a blood oath of allegiance. Strict discipline now demanded that every act of treachery must be punished. This accounts for the countless executions in cold blood upon the mere word of Jan van Leiden during the closing months of the siege, not because of religious fanaticism, but of the necessity of keeping discipline within the ranks. It was a war measure.

As the months dragged on and the situation of the Münsterites became more desperate and hopeless, van Leiden devised new schemes of control, and discovered new sources of hope of victory; upon Bible authority of course, because that gave all he did religious sanction, the greatest of all the sources of courage and hope. Following Old Testament example, he now abandoned the theocratic form of government with ruling elders which had been established by Matthys, and set up a supreme dictatorship with himself at the head under the title of King David. From now on his word was law. Perhaps even the introduction of polygamy was the result of military necessity, and in the interests of public morality rather than as a concession to the lust of King David. There were many more women than men in Münster

at this period. It is entirely possible that the order compelling every woman to choose a husband was inaugurated as a measure of protection to the women themselves, and in the interests of public morality. At any rate the practise had ample Old Testament sanction. Contrary to the popular notion, there was no promiscuity or community of wives. Breaches of the marriage tie, and violations of the prescribed standards were summarily punished.

### **Jan van Leiden**

In the meantime the apostles who had earlier been sent out to invite the oppressed to share the new Israel, were now succeeded by envoys who were secretly sent through the lines to urge these same oppressed to come to the help of their brethren in distress. The times evidently were ripe for a wide acceptance throughout the whole north country of the Münsterite doctrines. The hope of relief from a relentless religious persecution and economic oppression, famine and pestilence, religious fanaticism, the breaking down of inefficient local government, and even the signs in the heavens in the form of a comet, all conspired together to turn all these regions into a seething revolt against the established religious order. In every town and village almost there were groups, varying as to size, of enthusiastic and fanatical men and women who either attempted to set up local Münsters, or who gathered together relief expeditions for the doomed city in Westphalia.

But none of the relief expeditions ever got far beyond their place of beginning; and nowhere were the fanatics able to gain the upper hand, although a number of cities along the Lower Rhine barely missed the fate of Münster. Some of these religious enthusiasts were perhaps recruited from the ranks of the Melchiorite party;

very few if any were of the peaceful, non-resistant group later known as Obbenites; many of them were pure adventurers ready for any excitement that came along. Most of them were genuine religious enthusiasts, misguided though sincere, seeking escape from religious persecution, and hoping for participation in the joys of the new Israel soon to be established. These latter generally accepted rebaptism, which now had become a mere symbol of admission into a new revolutionary party, and perhaps no longer had any real religious significance. But they are generally known by the name Anabaptist.

### **The End of the "Kingdom"**

The situation of the defenders of Münster became increasingly desperate in the winter of 1534 and spring of 1535. Intercourse with the outside world had been entirely cut off. Food became scarce. Famine and disease threatened early disaster. Every available foot of ground space within the walls was planted to seed. First the horses were slaughtered, then the dogs and cats, later mice and rats and every living thing that could be eaten; and finally the daily diet was reduced to leather, leaves and grass. Small groups of discouraged spirits continually attempted escape through the lines only to be captured by the army of the bishop and put to immediate death. And so near the end, the population had been so reduced by famine, disease, desertion, execution and suicide that by the time the city fell, through the treachery of one of its own defenders, there were only a few hundred of the faithful left. Such as survived the above calamities were now summarily put to the sword by the victorious besiegers. A few of the leaders were reserved for a worse fate. Rothmann disappeared, and his fate has remained a mystery to this day. But Jan van Leiden, together with Bernhard Knipperdolling were taken

captive, later to be sent through all the towns of north-western Germany as criminal exhibits, and finally after severe torture to be publically executed as dangerous criminals. Their bodies were then placed in iron cages suspended from the towers of St. Lambert's church, and exposed to the public gaze until they rotted. Their bones lay bleaching in the sun for many years as an example to the passerby of what happens to such as dare oppose the established authority in church and state.

Among the lessons to be extracted from this unfortunate episode in Anabaptist history perhaps this one is outstanding—the union of intense enthusiasm with ignorance is almost sure to bear evil fruit. While the leaders of the sober and thoroughly sane type of Anabaptism were men of solid learning, such men as Conrad Grebel, Balthasar Hubmaier, Hans Denk, Michael Sattler, and later Menno Simons, ex-monks and university graduates for the most part, the leaders of the fanatical offshoots, on the other hand, were men of little or no scholastic training; laboring men, intensely interested, and perhaps well posted in the contents of a single book—the Bible, but with little knowledge of the great outside field of learning, self-appointed lay preachers largely, men of unbalanced interests. Hans Hut was a carpenter, and Melchior Hoffman a tanner, Jan Matthys was a baker, and Jan van Leiden a tailor. Even knowledge of the Bible if not backed up by a sane and well balanced world view may not be a safeguard against religious fanaticism and spiritual anarchy.

If the reader feels that too much space has been given to the Münsterites in this brief survey of Anabaptist history, this justification may be offered—the fact that few modern writers take the trouble to differentiate between the fanatical and sober groups, to the great injustice of the latter. Anabaptism is made to cover a multitude of



sins. It is undoubtedly quite evident to the reader of this chapter that the misguided, fanatical and violently revolutionary Münsterites differ as night and day from the peaceful, sober, non-resistant Swiss Brethren, and their following in Tyrol, Moravia and South Germany. The two groups shared but one thing in common; both were separatists, and made rebaptism a symbol of their separation from the prevailing state churches. The Münsterites, however, practically established a state church of their own. In other practises and doctrines as important as that of baptism they differed widely, so widely that their differences were much greater than their common interest.

And so, between the Swiss and other non-resistant Anabaptists, and the Münsterites there was no spiritual kinship whatever. But no matter how bitterly the non-resistant groups repudiated the revolutionary acts of the Münsterites, nor how insistently they complained against being classified in the same group, the authorities, both church and state, persisted in branding all separatists who practised rebaptism under one name, the hated name of Münsterite Anabaptist, glad that in the stigma of that name they possessed a powerful weapon in their fight against all those who demanded freedom of conscience. The non-resistant Brethren never were able to clear themselves of the odium. And, as a result, after the collapse of Münster all such groups as practised adult baptism, irrespective of any other theories or practises, were submitted to a period of terrible persecution all over Europe which lasted for nearly another full century.

No historian of the Anabaptist movement, using the term in its widest generic meaning, of course can claim the absence of all lineal connection between the South German Brethren and the Münsterites. There was in a way a direct succession from the followers of Sattler and

Denk in Strassburg, where Hoffman was baptized, through the latter by way of Tripmaker, Matthys, and Jan Leiden. But the mere fact that Leiden can trace his baptism through direct lineage to the non-resistant Anabaptists at Strassburg does not commit the large body of peaceful Anabaptists to the evil practises and the fanatical theories that found their first inception in the fertile though diseased brain of that ill-advised revolutionist. Denk and Sattler were in no way responsible for the later excesses of Jan van Leiden. Though it must be confessed that the chiliastic theories of Hut and Hoffman were full of dynamite. For this reason, too, no story of the Anabaptists, even in the more limited meaning of the term, is quite complete without at least a brief mention of the rise and fall of Münster.

### AFTER MÜNSTER

It should be remembered, too, that the Münster influence was confined almost exclusively to northwestern Germany and The Netherlands. It never reached far southward. The Brethren of the south did not have to contend with the fanatics as did the Anabaptists of the Low Countries. In The Netherlands, too, as has been suggested, there were numerous Melchiorites who were not corrupted by the Münsterites; and a peaceful group who kept themselves entirely aloof. In fact this latter group, though at first affiliated with the Melchiorites, yet soon began to disagree with the peculiar beliefs of Melchior Hoffman that the millennium was at hand, soon to be inaugurated without the active participation of the faithful. This remnant, just how large we do not know, directed by a saner and more intelligent leadership, kept their sanity, and finding no evidence in the Scriptures of an immediate impending social cataclysm, were convinced

that the world would continue for some time to move along conventional lines, with the tares and the wheat growing up together, and sinner and saint living side by side. Sin would continue in the world, and the true Christian would have to continue his struggle to build up the kingdom of God on earth against the evil designs of wicked men. The millennium was still far away; and the end of suffering was not yet.

The leader of this group was Obbe Philips, aided later by his younger brother Dirk, two devout Frisian Catholics from Leeuwarden, who in the early thirties of the century had affiliated themselves with the Melchior Anabaptists of that region. Of the two brothers, Dirk was perhaps the better educated, being a member of the order of Franciscans. But Obbe, too, as a surgeon by profession, must have been a man of more than ordinary intelligence, certainly with more learning than that possessed by the leaders of the more fanatical wings of the Anabaptist movement of his day.

Although ordained an elder in the Melchior group, he soon found himself at variance with the Melchiorite teaching on the early approach of the millennium; and especially when some of the Melchiorites began to develop decided leanings toward Münster, he launched a vigorous protest against the whole Münsterite movement. Such of his members as left for Münster he expelled from membership. And in order to save his flock from contamination by the expelled Münsterites he added another religious practise to that of expulsion—*Avoidance*, which forbade all social intercourse as well as religious affiliation with an expelled member.

This practise, which as we shall see later, played an important role among the controversies in the early history of the Mennonite church, was thus first inaugurated as a defensive measure guarding the church against false

teaching from without, rather than as a means of bringing back an erring brother who had been denied church fellowship because of wrong doing, which was the usual justification offered by later apologists for the practise.

This peaceful and soundly biblical wing of the Anabaptist movement in The Netherlands was sometimes called by the name of *Obbenites* after their chief leader; and was the group with which Menno Simons later affiliated.

In order, therefore, to be true to historic fact, as well as to be fair to a large body of humble and pious followers of the man of Galilee, one must discriminate when speaking of the people generally known during the Reformation period as Anabaptists. Although modern historians generally fail to make this distinction, the writers of the middle of the sixteenth century did not. Heinrich Bullinger, a Swiss Reformed preacher, and historian of this movement, writing in 1560, recognized thirteen different groups among the Anabaptists in the course of their history to his time. Among others he mentions the *Apostolic*, who read their Bibles literally, travelled about without staff and shoes, and carried no money; the *Holy, Sinless, Baptists*, who omitted "forgive our sins" from the Lord's prayer because they were beyond sinning; the *Enthusiasts*; *Free Brethren*, and the remaining groups to the *Münsterites*, who differed from all the others, in that while all others lived a peaceful, sober life, pious and humble, opposed to the exercise of authority, these on the other hand "aimed to dominate the world through force." Christoff Erhardus, a bitter opponent of the *Hutterites*, writing in 1589 lists forty separate groups. Among his Latin and German titles, foisted upon them by their enemies of course, here freely translated into English are the following—*Münzerites*, *Münsterites*, *Stäbler*, *Austerlitzer*, *David Georgites*, *Mennonites*, *Silent Breth-*

*ren, Hoffmanites, Apostolical, Holy Brethren, Blood Thirsty, Barefooted Brethren, Priest Murderers, Adam Pastorites, Gabrielites, Swiss Brethren, Pilgram Marbeckites, Epicureans, Hutterites, etc.* Like Bullinger's list of course this also includes all the factions from the beginning of the movement up to the author's own day, all but three of which by this time had long since passed into history; and several of which seemingly never existed at all, not as Anabaptists at least.

As just suggested, only one type of Anabaptism has survived to this present time—the non-resistant type divided into three groups—the Dutch group, called *Doopsgezinde* or *Mennonites*; the Moravian *Hutterites*; and the Swiss *Brethren*, usually called *Alt-Evangelische Taufgesinnte* or *Täufer*.

Of the classification by modern historians that by Newman is as good as any. Newman mentions only a few groups. Among these—the *Chiliastic Anabaptists*, in which he includes the Melchiorites, as well as the Münsterites; the *Soundly Biblical Anabaptists*, composed of the Swiss Brethren, and their followers in South Germany, the Moravian Hutterites, and the Mennonites; the *Pantheistic* in which he places David Joris; the *Mystical*, where we find Hans Denk and Ludwig Hetzer; and the *Antitrinitarians*.

The fall of Münster, whetting as it did the appetite of the ruling authorities for persecution, and intensifying the determination to root out every vestige of Anabaptism, good and bad, completely drove the movement under cover in the Low Countries; and all but exterminated the fanatical wing of the party. Not all at once, however. The Münster spirit still lingered on for a time in a number of places. Under a new leader, Jan van Batenburg, a former burgomaster of Steenwijk, polygamy, the



right of revolution, and the near approach of the new Jerusalem were upheld by these small groups as vigorously as ever; although no immediate attempt was made to establish another Münster. The Melchiorites remained for a time as strong as ever, though oppressed; but soon the conservative wing, the Obbenites, disagreeing with the Melchiorites in their immediate millennarian expectations, were gaining at the expense of all the others.

It now occurred to some one, just who made the first suggestion is not known, but perhaps David Joris, to call a convention of the different factions to attempt a reconciliation of their various views. The conference was held in the summer of 1536 in the Westphalian town of Bocholt near the Dutch border. None of the leaders of the various factions graced the meeting with their presence except David Joris himself, who was easily the dominating spirit of the whole affair. Many Batenburger, however, were present, as were also some of the Melchiorites. Perhaps not many of the Obbenites. The chief issue under discussion was the relation of the Christian toward the new Israel—was he permitted to use the sword to bring about the new order? The Batenburger said yes; the Melchiorites and Obbenites said no. Joris now, who had formerly been a Melchiorite, and had been ordained as a minister by Obbe Philips, tried the part of a compromiser, by suggesting that although the Batenburger were right in their contention that the Christian might use the sword, but that the time was not yet ripe for such action. Joris no doubt won a number to his way of thinking; for soon after this we find in the records mention of a new Anabaptist sect—the Davidians. Batenburg when he heard of the results of this meeting, enraged at what he thought was a deliberate attempt on the part of Joris to gain a personal following called him an Absalom, and threatened him with personal violence.

It is not likely that the Bocholt conference succeeded very far in the attempt to harmonize the views of the different factions; for, as late as the middle of the century Countess Anna of East Friesland still recognized among the different parties, the *Batenburger*, *Davidians*, *Obbenites* and now also the *Mennonites*. Batenburg was executed for revolutionary teachings in 1537. Joris soon developed further unsound religious theories, and was excommunicated by Obbe Philips. After a rather questionable career, he finally found his way to Basel where under an assumed name he lived down his past, and even won a place of honor until after his death in 1556. In course of time the various corrupt sects died out, and the non-resistant Obbenites, and no doubt many of the Melchiorites were gathered together under a new leader—Menno Simons.

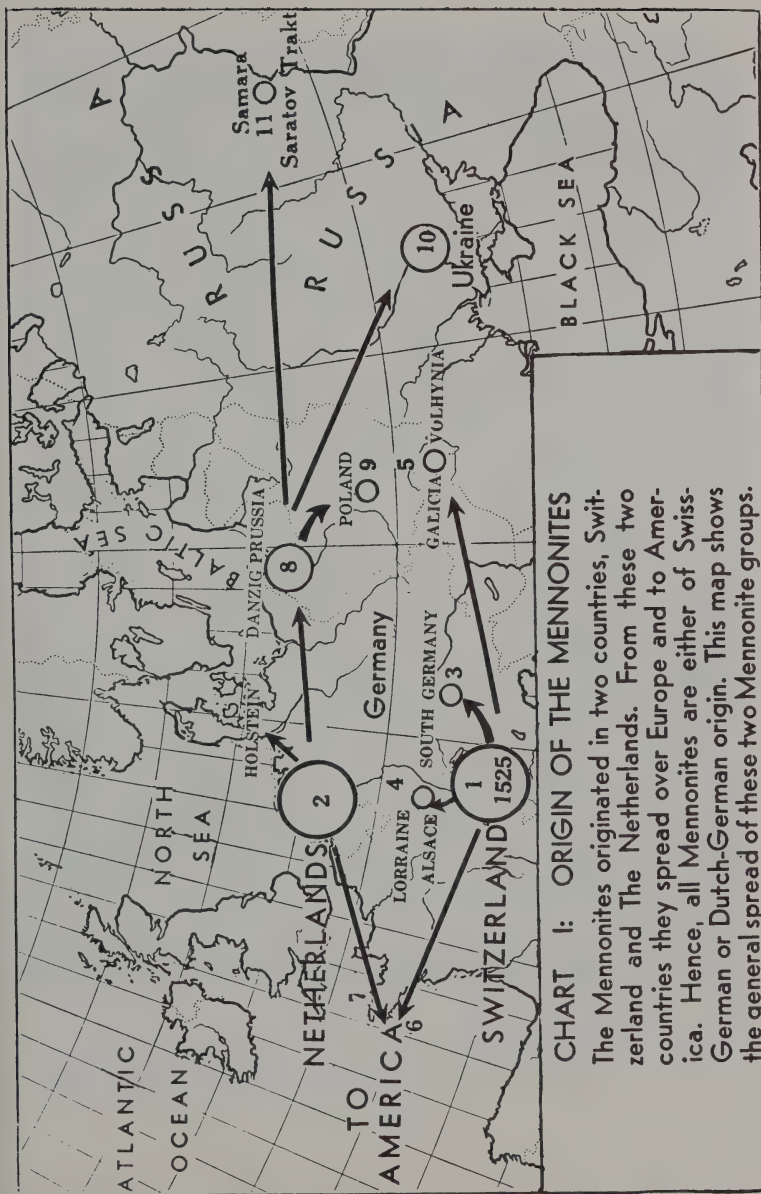


CHART 1: ORIGIN OF THE MENNONITES

The Mennonites originated in two countries, Switzerland and The Netherlands. From these two countries they spread over Europe and to America. Hence, all Mennonites are either of Swiss-German or Dutch-German origin. This map shows the general spread of these two Mennonite groups.



1496-1557 Menno Simons. 1501

Menno Simons. Etching by Arend Hendriks

## II

### MENNO SIMONS

Menno Simons, like his contemporary, Martin Luther, was of peasant origin, having been born in 1496 in a little Frisian village called Witmarsum, located a few miles inland from the North Sea coast. Of his early life we know little beyond what he himself has left us in a brief autobiographical sketch written in his later years. Evidently he was early destined for the church, for in his twenty-eighth year he assumed the duties of the priesthood in what was then his father's village, Pingjum, a mile or two seaward from his own birthplace. His preparation was not extensive, perhaps just enough to meet the simple requirements of a country priest. He knew a little Latin, less Greek, and, according to his own confession, no Scripture. Later in life, however, through wide reading, he acquired not only a minute knowledge of the Bible, but a rather broad acquaintance with the general field of church history as well.

#### **Priesthood**

As a priest Menno likely lived the life of his class—an easy-going, care-free life, assuming the burdens of his office rather lightheartedly. Like his companions he spent his days, he says, in “playing, drinking, and all manner of frivolous diversions.” Like them in all but one very unusual respect—he was blessed with an open mind and a tender conscience. Such being the case, he could not remain entirely oblivious to the revolutionary



religious movements that were then shaking all northern Europe to its very foundations. It is known that quite early in his ecclesiastical career he had access to the writings of Luther which were being surreptitiously circulated throughout the Dutch monasteries and among the Dutch priests in spite of every effort on the part of the higher state and church authorities to suppress them. He began to waver in the faith.

The seed of doubt fell upon promising soil. One day while Menno was perfunctorily handling the bread and wine in the celebration of a mass, the thought flashed through his mind that this bit of bread could not possibly be the flesh of Christ as he had always been taught to believe. At first he gave the suggestion but little thought, ascribing it to the work of the devil in an attempt to lure a good man away from his faith. But it came back to him again and again. He prayed, and sighed and confessed, but all to no avail. The conviction grew. Finally he was driven to the source of help to which he should have gone in the first place—the New Testament, which up to this time, he said, had been a sealed book to him. Here, finally “without any human aid or advice” he found relief from his doubts. The bread was not the body of Christ. His conscience was relieved; and he was greatly encouraged in the belief “that no human authority can bind to eternal death.”

But once led to question the validity of a cardinal doctrine of the church, the way was opened to other doubts. Not long after this, Menno heard of the beheading at Leeuwarden, the capitol city of the province, of one Sicke Freriks, a tailor, because of rebaptism. A second baptism seemed a strange doctrine to the troubled priest. Thus far he had never doubted the validity of infant baptism. But now he again turned to the New Testament for light; and was surprised that he could

find no justification there for the doctrine. He consulted his superior at Pingjum, who was also forced to admit that there was no direct scriptural authority for the practise. Menno then turned to Luther, Zwingli and Bullinger; and finding that all these differed not only from one another in their justification of the doctrine but from the whole New Testament teaching on the question as well, he was forced to the conclusion that infant baptism, too, was an error without scriptural foundation.

Although convinced that his church taught erroneous views on two important religious doctrines, yet Menno had no thought of immediately withdrawing from it, or of laying down his priestly office. He had been promoted in the meantime to a more honorable and lucrative position at Witmarsum, his native village, and the future seemed promising. In view of these bright prospects it is not difficult to understand why just at this particular time he was slow to follow his growing convictions to their logical conclusions. It was about this time, too, that Anabaptists of various types began to appear in the vicinity of Witmarsum, and soon after, disciples of Jan Matthys from Münster. The new parish priest, who evidently had considerable ability as a speaker and writer, now eased his conscience somewhat and exercised his talents by a vigorous attack upon the latter, gaining quite a reputation among his fellow priests for his ability to successfully refute the false prophets from Münster. "The report spread far abroad, that I could readily silence these persons," he said. "All looked to me."

But the troubled conscience of this sincere pastor of Witmarsum would not permit him long to live under false pretence. When he saw that his attack upon the errors of the Münsterites was interpreted by his friends as a wholehearted endorsement of the entire Catholic system, he was disturbed in spirit. Attracted by worldly

success, and at the same time convicted by a tender conscience, he evidently hoped for a time to serve both God and Mammon. Although not yet completely a follower of the peaceful Anabaptists, still he knew that at heart he agreed with some of their teachings, although he bitterly opposed the erroneous views of the Münsterites. His heart was sorely troubled.

Not long after this there occurred at Bolsward, not far from Witmarsum, another impressive incident, the third in the course of Menno's gradual conversion, which had a decisive influence upon his future career. A group of some three hundred Anabaptists, men, women and children, somewhat tainted with the revolutionary theories of Münster, had taken refuge in an old cloister where they were attacked by a small force which had been sent against them by the provincial governor. These poor deluded enthusiasts took up arms in self-defence, but were soon overpowered and most of them, including Menno's own brother, were put to the sword. Only the surviving women and children were spared.

This catastrophe, occurring almost at his own door, and claiming a member of his own family, made a profound impression upon the future leader of the Dutch Anabaptists. The courage of these men and women, who, although in error, dared to face death itself for their convictions disturbed his ease-loving conscience; while the need to combat the very errors that were at the bottom of their undoing appealed strongly to his sense of responsibility for the welfare of the weak and erring. "Reflecting upon these things," he says:

My soul was so grieved that I could no longer endure it, I thought to myself—I, miserable man, what shall I do? If I continue in this way and live not agreeable to the word of the Lord, according to the knowledge of the truth which

I have obtained; if I do not rebuke to the best of my ability the hypocrisy, the impenitent, carnal life, the perverted baptism, the Lord's Supper; and the false worship of God which the learned teach; if I through bodily fear, do not show them the true foundation of the truth, neither use all my powers to direct the wandering flock, who would gladly do their duty if they knew it, to the true pastures of Christ—O how shall their shed blood, though in error, rise against me in the judgment of the Almighty, and pronounce sentence against my poor miserable soul.

### **Renunciation of the Papacy**

Menno Simons was now ready for the final step. In the month of January of 1536, he laid down his priestly office, renounced the Catholic church, shut the door on a brilliant career, a life of ease and pleasure; and deliberately chose instead a life of uncertainty, misery, and poverty, constantly threatened with imprisonment, persecution, and death; but at the same time a life of loyalty to his convictions and great service to his fellow men; and of peace with his God. Without in the least belittling the services to the world of men like Luther and Calvin, it must be kept in mind, nevertheless, when comparing their choice with that of Menno Simons', that they made no personal sacrifice in the work they undertook. They never left the church; they rather transformed the machinery and remained at the head of it. They never renounced fat salaries, and positions of ease; they were never despised, but on the contrary highly honored by rulers, both state and church. Menno Simons on the other hand, deliberately chose the way of the cross. For the rest of his days he remained an outlaw, and with his wife and children a wanderer upon the face of the earth, a reward upon his head. Even those who dared give him and his family food and shelter paid for their kindness with their lives.

Referring later in life to this contrast Menno says,

For eighteen years now I, my poor feeble wife and little children have endured extreme anxiety, oppression, affliction, misery, and persecution; and at the peril of my life have been compelled everywhere to live in fear and seclusion; yea, while the state ministers repose on beds of ease and of soft pillows, we generally have to hide ourselves in secluded corners; while they appear at weddings and banquets with great pomp, with pipe and lute, we must be on guard when the dogs bark lest the captors be on hand. Whilst they are saluted as doctors, lords, and teachers on every hand, we have to hear that we are ana-baptists, hedge preachers, deceivers and heretics, and must be saluted in the name of the devil. In short while they are gloriously rewarded for their services with large incomes and easy times, our recompence and portion must be fire, sword, and death.

This converted parish priest, it will thus be observed, arrived at his conclusions and convictions through a gradual process, by his own volition, and as a result of an independent study of the Scriptures. He was not swept from his moorings by the enthusiasm of a great popular religious uprising. He seemingly had every earthly reason to remain within his church, and none to withdraw from it—except one, his conscience. In a way he typified the whole Anabaptist movement. Anabaptism, as we know, was not merely the reappearance of earlier evangelical sects, but rather a spontaneous religious movement among the common people having its source in a widely read Bible, newly turned into the vernacular.

### **Baptism and Ordination**

As soon as Menno Simons renounced the Catholic church he must have left his home village and the province of Friesland. In the neighboring province of Gron-



ingen he found a temporary refuge where he was able to study the Bible and do his first writing.

Where and when he was baptized by Obbe Philips, the leader of the peaceful Anabaptist movement, is unknown. Like Luther and other Reformation leaders who had once been priests, Menno took unto himself a wife soon after leaving the order, a certain Gertrude, likely from his own native village, who for the rest of her days remained a faithful companion through all the vicissitudes of his precarious life, and shared with him all the dangers and hardships that were his. They had at least three children.

Hardly had Menno cast his lot with the Groningen Anabaptists when the heads of that movement, recognizing his ability as a leader, urged him to submit to ordination as an elder in the organization. But true to form, Menno refused to assume the responsibilities of leadership, hesitating as he says, because of his

limited talents, great ignorance, weak nature, timidity of flesh, the unbounded wickedness, perversity of the world, the powerful sects, subtlety of different minds, and the heavy cross

that would oppress him if he should accept the urgent solicitations of his friends. But on the other hand when he thought

of the miserable, starving condition, and the necessity of these pious God-fearing children, who erred as innocent sheep having no shepherd

his compassion for his misguided fellow beings overcame his natural timidity, and he finally permitted himself to be ordained a full fledged elder by the same Obbe Philips who had baptized him a short time before.

Little is known about the residence and the itinerary of Menno Simons during the next years. Together with his co-laborers, Obbe and Dirk Philips, two brothers, he labored earnestly in behalf of his chosen cause—preaching, baptizing, writing, ordaining other elders and organizing the growing church. Occasionally he made a secret visit to the neighboring provinces including his own fatherland Friesland, where, in 1542, an imperial edict, drawn up at Leeuwarden, and carrying the name of Emperor Charles V, was issued against him. According to this decree no one was to receive “Minne Symonsz” in his house or on his property, give him shelter, food or drink, or even speak with him, or read any of his books under penalty of loss of property and life as a heretic. To any one who might apprehend the fugitive a reward of one hundred gulden was promised, a sum equal to the annual salary of a priest at Witmarsum. In case the informant was an Anabaptist he would be granted full pardon for having been a member of that sect, or for “lesser crimes.”

### Obbe's Defection

It was during this period, about 1540, that Menno experienced a great disappointment in the withdrawal of Obbe Philips from the Anabaptist cause. Just why Obbe withdrew at this time is not certain. Some say that he no longer had the courage to face the increasing dangers that threatened the lives of the leaders of the cause; others are unkind enough to suggest that he was jealous of the growing influence of his disciple Menno Simons. He himself asserts that he had been deceived in his call to the ministry; that, since the disciples of Jan Matthys, by whom he had been ordained, had themselves been in error, his own call, as well as that of those whom he in turn had ordained was not apostolic nor valid.

Likely Obbe had neither the faith nor the courage of his brother Dirk or of Menno. He perhaps had shared the hopes of the Melchiorites that soon the kingdom of the elect was to be established, when the righteous would enter upon their reward. Now Hoffman was languishing in prison at Strassburg, Jan Matthys had met a tragic death, and the righteous everywhere were being crushed out with fire and sword. The future seemed hopeless. Obbe felt himself deceived. What is the use, he may have thought, like many another leader of a forlorn cause before him. He had neither the faith nor the heart to continue the struggle. He retired to the city of Rostock on the Baltic where, if he kept his opinions to himself, he might spend his days without molestation. At any rate his withdrawal, though by no means a death blow to the cause, nevertheless, was a great disappointment to Menno who spoke of Obbe as a Demas, and as one who gave great comfort to the state churches by his defection. Obbe Philips now drops completely out of Anabaptist history.

In East Friesland, Menno Simons was safe from molestation for a time. Countess Anna, the ruler at this time, was well disposed toward the Reformation movement, though the exact nature of the church she hoped to establish under her rule had not yet been fully decided upon. It was during this transition stage that East Friesland became an asylum for the persecuted religious groups of northwestern Germany and Holland, even the Batenburger and other offshoots of the Münsterites being tolerated. The outstanding event of Menno's stay here was his debate with John a Lasco, the Polish reformer, who had been responsible for Anna's religious establishment.

## Debate with Johan a Lasco

This debate, initiated by a Lasco himself, the outstanding Reformation leader of northern Europe, was held in Emden, the chief seaport of northwestern Germany, and incidentally the seat of the oldest Mennonite church of this whole region. The discussion, which lasted for three days, centered about the main issue which separated the Anabaptists from the state churches—baptism and its allied doctrines, to which were added several others, the calling of ministers and the doctrine of the incarnation.

On the question of baptism, Menno advanced the well-known arguments familiar to all Anabaptists, while a Lasco reviewed the common ground held by all the state churches. On the calling of the ministers also both covered familiar ground already so frequently advanced by earlier champions in various discussions. A Lasco favored a theologically trained, state controlled ministry, well fed and clothed at public expense. Menno, on the other hand, advocated a ministry selected from the congregation without reference to theological training, but of a regenerated life, and supported by voluntary contributions. He was especially bitter against the benefices, fat livings, and exalted positions of the state preachers of the Gospel whom he often spoke of as hirelings.

## Menno on the Incarnation

On Menno's view of the incarnation it is necessary to say a few words further; for his theories on this subject were not held by his brethren in Switzerland in that day, nor by those who bear his name anywhere in the world today. His view was not original with him, but was inherited from Obbe Philips, who in turn got it from

Melchior Hoffman, so far as we know its first advocate. Hoffman's peculiar doctrine needs but little elaboration here. He believed, it will be remembered, that Jesus in order to remain entirely free from sinfulness had to receive his body elsewhere than through the flesh of Mary. Once Menno accepted this teaching, he became its consistent advocate to the end. In his attempts to justify his peculiar explanation of the doctrine, Menno often ventured into biological and philosophical arguments beyond his depth. It would no doubt have been better for him as well as all concerned had he followed the advice of his South German brethren, who in a conference held at Strassburg, in 1555, suggested, relative to this controversy

The confusion of tongues has come upon the brethren in this matter because they would know more than it was intended they should know.

They should be content, so these practical Germans thought, with the statement "The word became flesh and tabernacled among us." This should be said, however, in behalf of Menno, he discussed the subject reluctantly, and never chose it for public debate unless forced to it; and it was just as reasonable an attempt, perhaps, to reconcile the divinity of Jesus with his humanity as was the orthodox explanation.

Because of the publicity attracted by this Emden debate, Menno found it expedient, in 1544, to seek a new refuge. It was just at this time, too, that Anna, urged by her neighboring rulers had agreed upon an order of exile against the various groups that had found temporary refuge within her domain. Acting upon the suggestion of a Lasco, however, she made a distinction between the peaceful followers of Menno and the revolutionary sects of Batenburg and others. The former, who for the first



time were now designated as *Menists*, were not included in the general proscription.

### Cologne and Wismar

Menno, however, thought it best to leave East Friesland. For the next two years he found a fruitful field of labor in the archbishopric of Cologne, where under a tolerant ruler, a spell of liberty was granted to all religious dissenters. He even challenged the theologians of the city of Bonn to a theological discussion, without success however. The restoration of a Romanist ruler, in 1546, again sent him on his travels, this time to the Lutheran Hanseatic free city of Wismar on the Baltic. It was during his stay here that he again met his old friend a Lasco, though not in a personal debate this time. The latter, who had been forced to leave Emden during the period of the Interim, 1548-1552, had served as the pastor of a flock of Dutch and North German refugees in London during that time. With the accession of Bloody Mary to the English throne in 1553, England ceased to be an asylum for continental Protestants; but with the Peace of Passau on the other hand, a year earlier, conditions had been reversed in Germany. The Protestant exiles consequently returned to their former homes. It was while a ship load of a Lasco's followers were seeking a new refuge along the Baltic that, one mid-winter day, they got caught in the ice in Wismar harbor a short distance from shore. But Wismar happened to be a Lutheran town, with little sympathy for Zwinglians. It remained, therefore, for the little Mennonite congregation of the place, barely tolerated themselves, to play the part of the good Samaritan to these ice-bound exiles. They visited the strangers on ship board, brought them food and drink, and needed medical supplies; and then

helped them to shore and found needed work for them for the winter.

One little incident in the course of this procedure surprised and greatly pained Menno. A humble, but warm-hearted Mennonite, having compassion on the children of a Lasco, offered to take them into his home and care for them for the winter. He was refused by their tutor, one of the leaders of the party, and a minister, a certain Hermes Backereel on the ground that a Lasco being of noble birth, and having much to do with lords, could not afford to have his children cared for in the home of a humble Mennonite. "I observed," said Menno on hearing of this incident, "that we have not met with the plain true, humble pilgrims of Christ."

### Another Debate

Distressing as the situation of the London exiles was, however, it was not sufficiently so to cool the ardor of their leaders for a theological controversy even with their deliverers. Hardly had they been safely landed before Hermes Backereel, learning that Menno Simons was living in seclusion in the city, sought him out and invited him to a theological debate in the presence of a group of Reformed and Mennonite listeners. Menno hesitated, but finally gave his consent. Hermes, not considering himself a match for Menno sent to Norden for Martin Micron, a renowned Dutch theologian, who had also been one of the London preachers, and whom the late Professor Dosker, of the Presbyterian Seminary of Louisville, describes as

a man small of stature, but contentious to a degree, always aching for a debate, always urging some disputation, and of course always considering himself the victor.

The debate lasted for several days, covering all the controversial points of doctrine. At times the argument became quite heated, but ended peaceably enough with a common meal. As was usual with discussions of this sort neither side was convinced, but both were satisfied with themselves.

Menno accused the Reformed party of unfair dealing in this debate. He entered the discussion reluctantly, he said, and with the understanding that it was to be a private affair, without publicity; and that the proceedings were not to be reported to the town authorities. The Mennonites, it is understood, were merely a tolerated people in this Lutheran town, to be left in peace so long as they carried on their worship in seclusion. Publicity would jeopardize their stay in the city. But contrary to the agreement, Micron and his friends broke their promise. A report of the proceedings was published, with the result that soon after, the Reformed as well as the Mennonites had to leave the city. Both of the disputants later continued their arguments in print in which neither did himself great credit. Quite as much heat as light was generated by the uncomplimentary adjectives that were hurled back and forth in the printed pages; though it must be admitted that Menno's language was much milder than was Martin's.

### **Literary Efforts**

In fact, Menno was a voluminous writer throughout this entire period. Most of his literary work consisted of an amplification of his arguments first presented in such debates as noted above, short treatises on the various distinctive Anabaptist doctrines, and replies to attacks made upon him by the various theologians of the day.

He often found it difficult to secure publishers for his works, since to print his books was made a criminal offence by imperial edict, punishable by death. Among his most important writings are his *Testimony against Jan van Leiden*, written while still a priest; *Renunciation of Rome*, in which he gives his reasons for leaving the Catholic church; *The Foundation Book*, written early in his ministry, but revised in 1555, in which can be found a complete statement of his mature religious views; and his comments on the *Twenty-fifth Psalm*, perhaps from a purely literary point of view by far his best work. His writings were collected and published soon after his death, and were published in several editions during the seventeenth century, the last time in The Netherlands in 1681. Menno's pre-eminence among the leaders of the Anabaptist movement in his day, and his dominating influence among their later followers is due, no doubt, as much to his literary efforts as to any other cause.

### Internal Dissensions

Unfortunately Menno Simons and his brethren were not only forced to defend themselves against enemies from without, but too often there was contention within. As early as 1547 he met Dirk Philips and a number of leading evangelists of the Baltic region for the purpose of disciplining two of their brethren who had drifted from the fundamentals—Adam Pastor, accused of anti-trinitarianism; and Frans de Cuyper, charged with pro-Catholic views. But before disposing of this trial it may not be out of place here first to introduce Menno's co-laborers.

Adam Pastor, earlier known as Roelof Martens, was a Westphalian by birth, a Roman priest, who left his order about the time Menno did. He was ordained with several

others in the early forties by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips. A man of broad education and training, "of medium height and without a beard" he was inclined to independent thinking. From the first he disagreed with Menno and Dirk in his interpretation of the doctrine of the incarnation, and later developed liberal theories of the trinity. According to a recent historian, who bases his charges upon Pastor's own writings, the latter

denied the trinity, the pre-existence of Christ, and the personality of the Holy Ghost. He evinced little sympathy with Paul, whose doctrine of salvation was apparently repugnant to him. Christ, His life, His words,—that is the content of his religion. He was totally averse to the Münster spirit, evidently a man of a clean life and a kindly disposition. He sided with the other Anabaptists in the rejection of infant baptism; but was against the overvaluation of adult baptism on faith. However, he condemned the position of the David Jorists, who, although they called themselves Anabaptists, permitted infant baptism, because they had no faith in any external application of the sacrament.

Such was Adam Pastor at the time of the Emden meeting.

Of Frans de Cuyper not much is known except that he, too, was one of Menno's appointees to the eldership, being ordained perhaps with Pastor; and that he refused to accept the prevailing Mennonite view of the incarnation and other leading doctrines. He retained a strong leaning toward Catholicism in all his religious thinking; and for that reason was placed under the ban by Menno against whom he later filed many charges with the ruling authorities in Holland.

About the same time, 1542, Menno and Dirk, the senior elders, ordained three others to this high position—Hendrik van Vreden, Antonius von Koeln, and Gillis



von Aachen. Of van Vreden we know nothing except that he, too, proved faithless to his calling, and joined the party of Pastor.

Antonius von Koeln began his Anabaptist career in Münster, being baptized by Roll in the house of Knipperdolling. He somehow survived the Münster catastrophe, but whether he left before or after the fall of the city is not certain. Likely before, however, for he soon cleared himself of all revolutionary taint, and became one of the most energetic workers for the cause of the non-resistant type of Anabaptism in northwestern Germany. He never agreed with Menno's strict views of discipline, and, about 1550, he either was placed under the ban or voluntarily withdrew from the Mennonite movement.

Gillis von Aachen became an Anabaptist as early as 1531. As an elder he later travelled extensively through Holland and northwestern Germany, baptizing it is said more martyrs than any of the other leaders of the movement. He must have been of a vacillating character, for in 1552, Menno placed him under the ban because of a moral lapse, to be reinstated, however, two years later upon confession of guilt. While engaged in evangelistic work, he was apprehended in Antwerp in 1557. Under torture he recanted, which cost him his place in van Braght's *Martyrs' Mirror*, although space was given to many of those who were baptized by him. But recantation availed Gillis nothing. His right arm was cut off at the time of execution, and his body thrown into the flames. Some years before, he had been described as "a man of medium size, with a pale face, big eyes, and a pointed brown beard." One of his sons later became a minister in Amsterdam; and his grandson was the well-known Doctor Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan.

## Co-Laborers

None of these co-laborers of Menno just mentioned, strange to say, remained faithful to the end. All at one time or another had been placed under the ban, and but one or two reinstated. Only two of his contemporaries shared with him to the end the responsibilities of guiding the new church through the dangers of the formative years—Leonard Bouwens, and Dirk Philips, already frequently mentioned.

Leonard Bouwens, a Dutchman, was born at Sommeldyk, in 1515, and died at Hoorn in 1582. After spending some years as an Anabaptist preacher, he was ordained an elder by Menno Simons in Emden, 1551. He was, perhaps, the most energetic and successful evangelist among the entire group of northern leaders. During his long service as an elder he baptized in Friesland, Holland, Groningen, Brabant and several other Dutch provinces more than ten thousand converts, it is said, in the course of some thirty years. Considering the fact that this period includes the time when Duke Alva and his Council of Blood was literally combing these provinces for heretics, this is a most remarkable and courageous record. Bouwens was a strict disciplinarian, and was, perhaps, largely personally responsible for the division that occurred within the ranks of the churches because of the strict application, during this time, of the ban. But even he did not escape church discipline, being relieved of his office by Dirk Philips; but upon the death of the latter he resumed his office on his own initiative, and retained it to the end.

Next to Menno, himself, the most influential of the Anabaptist leaders was Dirk Philips, who was born at Leeuwarden, trained for the priesthood, won for the Anabaptist cause by Pieter de Houtzager, a disciple of

Jan Matthys, and in 1536 ordained as an elder by his brother Obbe. Dirk was Menno's most intimate associate in all the important activities of the Mennonite movement, although a little more conservative than the latter on most of the religious practises common to the faith. Like Menno, he, too, wrote numerous treatises and tracts on fundamental doctrines, the most extensive being his *Enchiridion*, which remains perhaps the most typical treatise of the conservative Anabaptism of his day. This work was printed in English for the first time in America in 1910 for the use of the Old Order Amish, among whom Dirk is still popular because of his strong advocacy of two doctrines still in practise among these people—avoidance, and foot washing. In his later days Dirk is described as “an old man with white hair, of medium stature, dressed in black, with a round cap, and he talked the dialect of the Brabanters.” He died in 1568.

These three—Menno, Dirk and Leonard, were the stalwart, unyielding, uncompromising defenders of a rigid reorganized Anabaptist faith, holding fast to the established doctrines to the end, banning all who showed the least desire to stray from the narrow path of orthodoxy as interpreted by them, and hardly able to keep from banning one another. Some sort of division of the field of labor was seemingly agreed upon among them. Dirk resided at Danzig; Menno at Wismar and later in Wüstenfeld; while Leonard made his headquarters at Emden, though his chief field of effort was in the northern Dutch provinces. All of them, however, found their way occasionally into The Netherlands which remained by far the most fruitful area in results. The congregations of northern Germany remained small and few.

### Church Discipline

All the above mentioned leaders were present at the

Emden meeting in 1547. Pastor and Cuyper were disciplined, and finally banned for their liberal views on the trinity, and Catholic doctrine of the incarnation, and it was decided to enforce Dirk's strict interpretation of the ban and avoidance.

The free use of these measures of discipline had by this time become a question of considerable controversy among the Mennonites all through the Low Countries. That the practise was driven to unjustifiable lengths there can be no doubt; but a better understanding of the conditions under which Menno worked will lead to a keener appreciation at least, if not a fuller justification, of the reasons for these rather harsh measures. The central doctrine of Menno's faith, as already observed, was the "new birth," a regenerated life. "Behold worthy reader," he says,

All those who are born of God with Christ who thus conform their weak life to the Gospel, are thus converted and follow the example of Christ, hear and believe his holy Word, follow his commands, which He in plain words commanded us in the Holy Scriptures, for the Holy Christian Church which has the promise.

True religion, in other words, is not merely a set of dogmas and practises; it must bear fruit in a purified life. Menno's most bitter philippics were hurled not at the beliefs of his state-church opponents, but rather at their unfruitful and corrupt lives. It is a well known fact among the historians of the Reformation that the morals of neither laity nor clergy were reformed immediately by the general Reformation movement. As the respect for the old established supports of the social order were undermined, moral standards during the transition period actually sank to a lower level. A popular couplet which went the rounds of the people clearly illustrates, Menno says, the prevailing ideals of license

and liberty—*Der Strick ist entzwei; Und wir sind frei.*

To Menno and his followers on the other hand the Reformation called, not for lower, but for higher standards of living "I know of a certainty," he says,

That a proud haughty man, whoever he may be, is no Christian: neither is an avaricious, selfish man, or a drunken, intemperate man, or an unchaste, lustful man, or a wrangling envious or disobedient, idolatrous man, or a false, lying, or an unfaithful, thievish man, or a defaming, backbiting man, or a blood thirsty, unmerciful, revengeful man a Christian, even if he were baptized a hundred times, and kept the Lord's Supper daily; for it is not the ordinances or rites, such as baptism and the supper, but a true Christian faith with its unblamable good fruits of which the ordinances testify, that makes a true Christian and has the promise of life.

The Christian church made up, according to Menno's ideal, of the regenerated, and not of the entire population, must be without "spot or wrinkle," pure and undefiled, not only in belief but in moral conduct as well. There must be no moral lapse. The Mennonites made the way of life straight and narrow. The state churches left it broad and open. The latter had no way of correcting gross sin; that was a function of the state, not of the church, so they said.

The only means of discipline by which a free, voluntary church could be kept up to such a high standard was the ban, through which the unworthy and unfaithful could be excluded and expelled. Against the corrupt sects of the time, as Menno calls them, the *Davidians*, *Batenburger*, and the *Münsterites*, who were trying to make inroads among the disciples of Menno, a strict application of the ban was the only adequate defence. *The Jewel of the Church* he lovingly calls this means of preserving his beloved little flock against the enemies within the gates.



This method of settling church controversies and of disciplining unruly members, which was based on Matthew 18:15-18, might be applied in three different forms, according to the seriousness of the fault—mere admonition, with hopes of a reconciliation; denial of access to the communion table; and expulsion from membership for gross sin. Several controversies soon arose among the brethren over the use of this means of discipline. Shall a gross sinner be first admonished and given time for repentance before expulsion, as in the case of one guilty of a minor fault, or shall he be expelled immediately after his guilt is established. Leonard Bouwens, the strictest of the strict said, yes, to the latter question; the others, favored leniency.

### Avoidance

But more serious even than this difference was the controversy over another practise which followed the ban, called *Avoidance*, by which the one excommunicated was to be “avoided” or ostracized by his former fellow members, not only in religious fellowship, but in all business and social relations as well. Scripturally this practise was based on the Pauline injunction “not to eat” with an unfaithful member (I Cor. 5:11), in order, according to such confessions of faith as advocated it, that he “may be made ashamed and thereby induced to amend his ways.” The motive here was most worthy, but unfortunately it was based on poor psychology. But here, too, there were differences of opinion. What did the phrase “not to eat” mean? Did it refer to the communion table only, or to all social relations? Most of the leaders said the latter. How generally should the practise be applied? Could any exceptions be made? Should husband and wife shun one another in case one or the other should be placed under the ban? Again Bouwens said,

yes, and would even include bed and board; Dirk agreed with him; Menno on the other hand wavered at first, but being threatened by Bouwens with the ban himself if he did not side in with the conservatives, he half-heartedly consented to join the strict banners, a fact which in his later years he regretted. He could never quite give his hearty consent to this practise. The consciences of the parties concerned, he said, should rule in the matter.

These hard regulations of the conjugal relations seem all the more strange when we remember that among the Mennonites the institution of marriage was a sacred one. Not quite so sacred, perhaps, as among the Catholics who made it a sacrament, but certainly much more sacred than with Luther, who said, "Marriage is an outward carnal thing like other worldly matters. Just as I may eat, drink, walk, ride, buy, and talk with the heathen, Jew or Turk and heretic, so may I also enter the married life with him and remain therein." To the Mennonites who, so to say, took a middle view, this was rank heresy. Marriage could be contracted only "in the Lord," which meant among members of the same faith, here Anabaptists. Marriage with outsiders was punishable with the ban. Divorce and separation were permitted only conditionally, and on New Testament grounds. But sacred as the institution was among the Mennonites, it was not exempt among the conservatives from the blighting influences of the "avoidance." Whether the practise was maintained because of, or in spite of the sacredness of the marriage tie may be a debatable question. Its chief excuse perhaps was the lack of literal scriptural ground for its exemption, though there were plenty of social grounds. Mixed marriages were opposed, of course, because they were not "in the Lord," and incidentally because they would threaten the integrity of the church.

These various questions had disturbed the brethren

not a little for some years. They were discussed, as we have seen, at the Emden meeting of 1547, and at later conferences, and finally at Wismar in 1554, when a number of the leaders laid down a set of rules on these as well as other subjects for the use of the churches. According to these rules, marriage with outsiders was forbidden; separation was permitted only in case one or the other party led an immoral life; marital avoidance was to be enforced in its most rigid form; business relations to be carried on with an apostate only in cases of extreme necessity; children were advised to marry only with the consent of their parents; just debts might be collected, but no unusual pressure was to be applied in doing so; bearing arms in military service was strictly prohibited; and finally no one was to preach unless duly ordained by the proper church authorities.

### **An Unfortunate Division**

The attempt to enforce these hard rules raised a storm in certain quarters. Leonard Bouwens and Gillis von Aachen decided to apply them to the letter in their jurisdictions. The trouble started when a little Dutch woman by the name of Swaantje Rutgers, with notions of her own, refused to deny her banned husband "bed and table" according to the regulations. Bouwens insisted. Swaantje had some friends. A division soon appeared in several of the congregations, especially Emden and Franeker. The factions appealed to Menno, who advised moderation, suggesting that the consciences of the parties concerned should govern in the matter. But all to no avail. Bouwens and his party insisted on enforcement, banning to the right and left all those who disagreed with him, even threatening Menno himself. The two churches were rent in twain, and the division was carried to other churches until the whole Lowland region

was aflame with the controversy. The strict party was sometimes called the party of the "Hard Banners"; while the milder group came to be known as the "Mild Banners."

This controversy even reached the Anabaptists of South Germany. In two conferences held in Strassburg, in 1555 and 1557, the Germans and Swiss discussed both the peculiar view of the Dutch Mennonites on the incarnation, as well as their strict interpretation of the ban and avoidance. On both questions they disagreed with their Dutch brethren.

In order to learn of the true situation in the Low Countries and also to attempt a reconciliation of the two factions, the latter conference sent a delegation of three men to Menno's home for the purpose of learning his views on the matter, and then with this information to visit the various Dutch congregations in an effort to establish harmony. But these men failed so utterly in their designs that their well-meant efforts ended only in still greater confusion, and the situation was made worse rather than better. Not only did the breach among the Dutch congregations remain, but now was added a new cleavage—between the Dutch and the German churches.

### **Declining Years**

Menno Simons was greatly disturbed by these events in his declining years, and travelled extensively among the disaffected congregations in the interests of harmony, but to no avail. Near the close of his life it is said he regretted having agreed to the strict interpretation of the ban; and to have advised his close friends not to be a "slave of men" as he had been.

In the meantime, in 1555, the Anabaptist congregation at Wismar was exiled by a general order of the Lutheran Hanseatic League of which that city was a member.

Menno, weary and discouraged, chose as a final resting place the little Anabaptist village of *Wüstenfeld*, a few miles beyond Oldesloe, in Holstein, on an estate called Fresenburg, owned by a certain count Bartholomäus von Ahlefeld. This nobleman had learned of the economic worth of the Mennonites while in The Netherlands, and had invited them to settle on his estate. Here he defended them against all attempts of imperial and local authorities to persecute them. Menno was even permitted to set up a printing press of his own near a little building within the shadow of a magnificent Linden which tradition says goes back to the days of the exiled printer himself. Why this place came to be called *Wüstenfeld* (waste field) is not quite certain. An old chronicler suggests that it was because the spot on which the village was built had but a short time before been cleared of a dense forest of oak. Perhaps so. In this village, Menno died on January 13, 1561 in the sixty-sixth year of his age; and according to a custom not unknown among the Anabaptists of that day, was buried in his own garden. The exact place of burial remained unknown for many years, because during the Thirty Years' War the village was destroyed and its site forgotten. But the memory of the traditional location was kept alive among the descendants of an old Mennonite family of Hamburg that had known Menno; and later excavations seemed to corroborate the tradition. At any rate in 1902 the church at Hamburg marked the supposed spot with an appropriate monument. *Wüstenfeld* is a misnomer today. The monument stands upon a little knoll in the middle of a large pasture lot, bordered by magnificent groves of oak, in which, during a midsummer visit by the author some years ago, a fine herd of sleek and well-fed Holstein cattle were browsing knee deep upon a luxurious growth of rich, deep green grass.



## Hero Stories

The numerous hero stories that accumulated about the name of Menno in course of time after his death no doubt, like the story of George Washington's hatchet, are based not so much on fact as upon the natural tendency of humankind to worship its heroes. The story of Menno's miraculous escape from capture one time by a shrewd answer returned from the driver's seat of a coach to the question of his would-be captors has also been told of other men. The fate that tied the tongue of a would-be betrayer who had agreed to betray Menno as he was passing by in a boat, but who was unable to utter a word until it was too late to accomplish his purpose, seems to be too good to be true. Even Menno's own recital, no doubt honestly believed, of stories of divine vengeance visited upon his enemies may have been the result of over credulity. The clergyman who was struck dead in the pulpit while denouncing the Anabaptist leader may have died from perfectly natural causes rather than as a result of direct divine displeasure.

## Menno's Place in History

Menno Simons deserves a higher rank among the great reformers than has thus far been accorded him by writers of church history. Although he did not play as conspicuous a role as did his contemporaries—Luther, Zwingli and Calvin—his real greatness can not be measured by the more humble part he seemed to play in the religious arena of his time. His task in many respects was a much more difficult one than that of the founders of the state churches. They relied upon a union of state and church, and upon the support of the strong arm of the political powers to maintain their system. Menno,

on the other hand, rested his appeal upon the persuasive power of love and the simple truth of the Gospel as sufficient to secure the permanency of the true church. He was centuries ahead of his day on many of the fundamentals of religious and civil liberty which today in America and until recently at least in the more enlightened parts of Europe have been taken for granted, such as religious toleration, separation of church and state, and the desirability of universal peace.

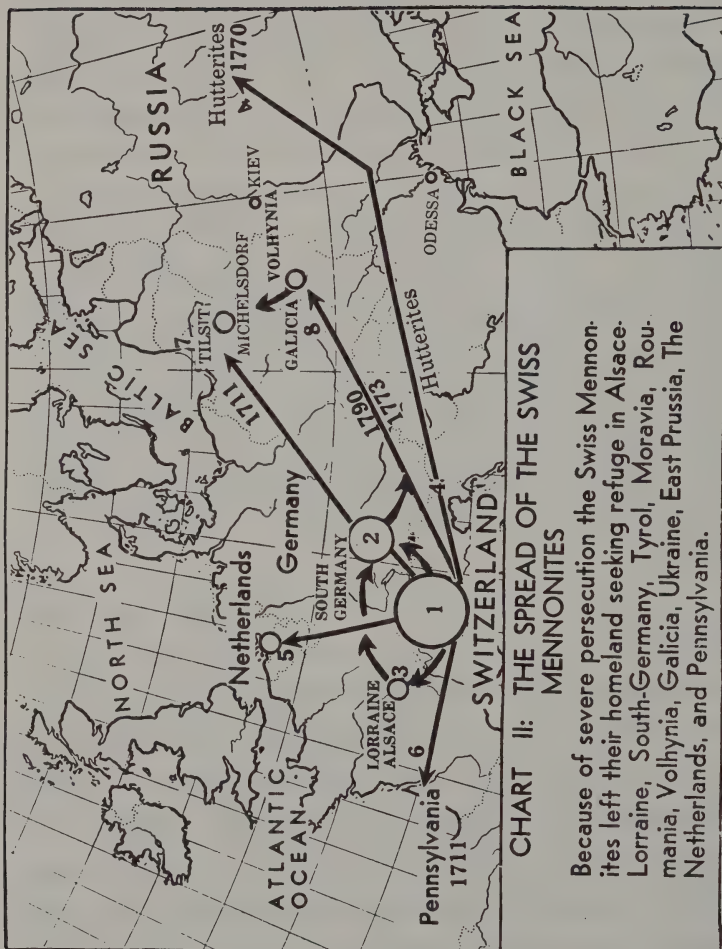
Menno Simons, it will be observed, was not the founder of a new church, but merely the leader, perhaps the most influential during a critical period of a movement already well under way. It was quite common then, as now, for religious groups to take the name of their leaders. Lutheranism itself is no exception. The Anabaptist parties followed the same rule. Among the earliest were the *Melchiorites*, the *Obbenites*, and the *Dirkites*. The term *Menist* was first used, as noted elsewhere, by Countess Anna of East Friesland in 1544 as a distinguishing term between the peaceful and the revolutionary Anabaptist parties.

### The Name "Mennonite"

The peaceful followers of Menno were especially averse to being called *Wederdoopers*, the common term applied in the Low Countries to all who practised adult baptism of whatever party, and that for two reasons. First, because the word implied an earlier baptism; but since the Mennonites did not recognize the validity of infant baptism, they maintained that the administering of the rite in adult years upon confession of faith was the first and only true baptism, and not a rebaptism. Second, the odious term, *Wederdooper* everywhere signified *Münsterite*. And so, they were glad for any name that

would set them apart from the Anabaptists of the Münster variety. *Doopsgezinde* (baptism-minded) was much less odious, and gained general acceptance among them. But for a time *Menist* was quite generally used to designate the peaceful Dutch Anabaptists. After the granting of religious toleration by William of Orange, the name *Menist* might again have fallen into disuse, had it not been revived for a time as a factional name. During the controversy over the ban with the division of the church into a strict and a liberal party, the strict faction, the *Flemish* and *Frisians*, who accepted Menno's conservative views on this question were again known as *Menists*; but the *Waterlanders*, the *Upper Germans*, and the *Young Frisians*, the liberal elements, repudiating the name of their rivals, preferred the name *Doopsgezinde*. As party strife died out during the eighteenth century, and as the Dutch churches began to depart from many of the earlier views of Menno, not only on this but on many other questions, *Doopsgezinde* came into general use, and was finally adopted as the official title of the church as a whole.

There was little contact in the early days between the *Doopsgezinde* of Holland and the German and Swiss *Täufer*, or *Taufgesinnte*, or *Brethren*, as they preferred to be known. The term *Menist*, however, was well known, and not unpopular in the latter regions during the eighteenth century when the big-hearted Dutch Mennonites so generously helped their oppressed brethren in the Palatinate and Switzerland. *Mennonite* was not generally used, however, in these regions. In France *Anabaptist* seemingly was not unpopular. One recent writer suggests that *Mennonite* as distinguished from *Anabaptist* was especially in use in those countries in which the imperial decrees against them were effective—Germany and The Netherlands—but not Switzerland.



### III

## SWITZERLAND

### CONTINUED PERSECUTION

Although effectively checked as a mass movement by 1535 in Switzerland as elsewhere, Anabaptism nevertheless lingered on in secluded corners throughout all the northern cantons—Zurich, Neuchatel, Basel, Aargau, Solothurn, Appenzell and Bern, for several centuries longer. Continued and persistent persecution, however, in course of time, completely annihilated it except in a few small regions in the Canton of Bern where today one still finds a limited number of small congregations in the Emmental and the Jura regions.

The history of the Anabaptists, or Mennonites as we shall call them hereafter, in the land of their origin, the Swiss republic, supposedly the home of religious toleration, is hardly more than a long, dreary tale of bloody persecution on the one hand, and of heroic self-sacrifice and sturdy devotion to religious conviction on the other, almost without parallel in the annals of all Europe. Swiss Mennonites were sent to the executioner's block until well into the seventeenth century. And after that throughout all the cantons above mentioned mandate after mandate was issued by the governing authorities directed against the liberties and lives of these peaceable and God-fearing people. Mennonites were forbidden to practise their own religion, and were commanded to attend the state church; they were ordered to have their children baptized, and to have their marriages solemnized by the regular clergy.



## To the Stake and Gallies

For refusing to comply with these demands, they were fined, imprisoned, and occasionally sent to the galleys; although at the same time the Swiss authorities were buying the freedom of French Huguenots, condemned to the same service; their property was confiscated, and their children declared illegitimate, and incapable of entering into their inheritance; they were branded and whipped into exile; and if they returned, as sometimes they did, they were threatened with the death penalty. Finally upon death, they were denied burial in the common burying grounds.

As a result of these extreme measures, a number of Mennonites died in prison; a few recanted; many of them fled to other more tolerant lands. During the latter part of the sixteenth century especially, Moravia offered them a haven of refuge, as it did also to their brethren from all parts of middle Europe. In fact throughout the entire century, Swiss Mennonites went back and forth continually to the "Promised Land." It was a group of Swiss exiles, it will be remembered, on their return to their native land, who, arrested and imprisoned at Passau in Bavaria in 1537, gave us the group of hymns out of which the well-known *Ausbund* later developed. Near the close of the century both Bern and Zurich passed rigid laws against this migration on the ground that since many of the Mennonites who left Switzerland with their possessions, later often returned empty handed, thus occasioning a heavy loss to the local communities from which they originally migrated.

It is a fine tribute to the sincerity of the Swiss Mennonites that in spite of all this terrible pressure there were but few recantations during this entire period; and it is a convincing example, too, of the persistence of a strongly

entrenched religious idea. The persecuting authorities had little understanding of and less patience with these unyielding convictions of a hard-pressed people, which they attributed to mere stubbornness of will. *Hitzköpfe* they called them, *verdamnte Irr- und Rottgeister*, and other hard names. The refusal of the latter to recant was ascribed to *Hochmut*, and still worse to *kybiger Hartneckigkeit*. Scores of the accused preferred the executioner's block to a betrayal of their innermost convictions. Van Braght, the martyrologist, is authority for the claim that by 1571 some forty Mennonites had paid the extreme price for their faith in the Canton of Bern alone.

The last Bernese martyr to give his life for the cause was Hans Haslibacher, of Sumiswald, whose death in 1571 is vividly recorded in the *Martyrs' Mirror*, as well as in a long hymn found in the later editions of the *Ausbund*. In this hymn is found the whole story of this martyr, somewhat colored by the pious imagination of the narrator—his imprisonment; torture; attempt by the state clergy to secure a recantation; the sturdy faith of the old man,

*This body you may put to death  
I'll give my head but not my faith*

he said; his vision and the prophecy that at his death three signs would prove his innocence, namely that as soon as his head would be severed from his body it would leap into his hat, the sun would turn red, and the town pump would flow crimson; the fulfillment of this prophecy; and the effect upon the executioner and attendants who were now convinced that they had shed innocent blood.

This Haslibacher hymn of thirty-two long stanzas,

sung as a whole, and in long meter, held a conspicuous place in the worship of the Swiss for hundreds of years, and is still sung today with little change in time or tune in numerous obscure corners in the country side in America where the Old Order Amish are found, though it is no longer sung in religious services, but, strange to say, at weddings and other festive occasions.

The last Mennonite in Zurich as well as in all Switzerland so far as the Martyrs' Mirror records show, to forfeit his life for his faith was Hans Landis, who was beheaded in 1614. Landis was an influential minister, who carried on his preaching and other ministerial duties contrary to a decree of the Zurich Council. He was arrested, imprisoned and finally condemned to the Venetian galleys. But filing his chains with an instrument smuggled in to him by a friend, he escaped. Returning to his native land, he was again taken into custody. Upon being ordered into exile, he refused, replying that God gave him the same right to the land as the others, and the Earth was the Lord's. At any rate he preferred to live in his native land; neither did he know where to go. Besides he was now old, and no longer feared death. As a result of this refusal to leave, he was condemned to death by the Great Council. The Martyrs' Mirror describes Landis as "a tall, stately man with a long grey and black beard, and with a strong, manly voice."

Persecution in Zurich did not end, however, with the death of the last martyr. Imprisonment and banishment continued. Especially severe was the oppression which set in again in both Zurich and Bern during and following the Thirty Years' War. All the old measures short of the death penalty were again revived. In 1657 there were one hundred and seventy Mennonites in the Zurich prisons, doomed to a *Mus und Brot* diet, with a little wine and meat on Sunday. The Martyrs' Mirror,

and the later editions of the *Ausbund* in an appendix gives a vivid account of the suffering of numerous Mennonites between 1635 and 1645 whose names have a familiar sound to one versed in Pennsylvania history,—such names as *Frick, Landis, Bauman, Strickler, Egly, Huber, Kolb, Hess, Meili, Haegi, Bachman, Schnebeli*, and others from Basel. And at the same time we hear such typical later Pennsylvania Amish names as Joder and Treyer. A little later an order for wholesale exile was passed by the Zurich Council. Several hundred emigrated to Alsace and the Palatinate. Emigration and deportation continued, until by 1700 there were few Mennonites left anywhere in northern Switzerland except in a few isolated communities in Basel and Neuchatel, and in the present canton of Bern.

That they were not entirely driven out of Bern as they were in Zurich was not due to any lack of diligence on the part of the Bernese authorities to bring about this end; for the latter, too, had decided upon a vigorous policy of extermination of these unyielding non-conformists. In 1659, after repeated efforts to bring the Mennonites into submission to the state church a general decree of exile was passed by the Bernese Council ordering all those who would not conform to be “utterly banished” from the country; and if they should return unconverted be “publicly scourged with rods, branded, and again expelled from the country.” The death penalty was no longer prescribed, however, for a third offence as it had been in earlier similar decrees. The property of the exiles was to be confiscated.

At the same time it was decreed with equal strictness that no one “whoever he shall be, shall lodge or give shelter to native or foreign Anabaptists, whether they be related to him or not, or help to encourage their meetings and preaching whether by granting them

the use of their barns or houses or by aiding them in any way or to have any intercourse with them whether written or oral; or in any way lend them aid in the form of money, provisions, or the like neither secretly or publicly." But on the other hand every one is ordered to report any known Mennonite to the magistrates. Failure to comply with this order on the part of non-Mennonites is punishable by a fine of a hundred guilders. This proclamation is to be read from all the pulpits in the state church.

### **Dutch Intercession**

In the meantime, while this order for wholesale deportation was being put into execution, the Mennonites of Holland, having heard of these high-handed measures against their Swiss brethren decided to intercede in their behalf. The Dutch Mennonites, unlike the Swiss, had by this time reached a position of great influence and power in financial and political circles in their own country. Some of the most influential merchants of the time as well as leaders in the sciences and arts were of their faith. They could speak, consequently, with some degree of authority. Through their influence, the burgomasters of Amsterdam and Rotterdam, as well as the States General itself, wrote letters to both the Bernese and Zurich councils, asking for milder treatment of the persecuted Mennonites, and especially that the latter might be permitted to leave the land in peace with all their possessions and families. The Mennonites in Holland, the States General said,

are a highly respected and peaceful people, willing at all times to perform all their civil duties, and giving liberally to all worthy causes, even contributing to the benevolences of the Reformed Church itself.



Influential Dutch Mennonites sent a special representative in 1660 to investigate conditions among the Swiss prisoners, and later to bring financial aid to those in need. But their representative, Adolf de Vreede by name, though not himself a Mennonite, found it difficult to gain access to the prisoners, while both the Bernese and Zurich councils forbade altogether the distribution of money. In fact some of the funds were later seized by the officials, and used to carry on the work of persecution. Even the Reformed church itself in Holland became interested in what they regarded as unnecessarily harsh measures adopted by their fellow believers in Switzerland. Professors in the Dutch universities, under whom many of the Swiss professors and clergymen had studied, wrote to the latter advising more humane treatment of those whose only sin was that they desired to worship God in their own way.

None of these intercessory efforts, however, were of much avail. The Swiss autocrats in Bern and Zurich had decided to rid themselves of Mennonitism once for all without any financial loss to themselves. So they turned a deaf ear to the advice of the States General and their own Reformed brethren, as well as to the pleas of the Dutch Mennonites. The decree of 1659 was carried out to the letter. Each year the most aggressive of the Mennonites, and especially their ministers were dispossessed of their property, torn from their families, and escorted across the border, threatened with worse treatment if they returned.

But the crucial year came in 1671, when some seven hundred men, women and children, mostly from Bern, but also the remnant from Zurich, the old and decrepit as well as the babes in arms, were driven out of their native land, penniless and helpless, about one

hundred to Alsace, and the rest into the Palatinate, where fortunately just at this time they had been invited to settle by the Count, Karl Ludwig, who desired thrifty farmers to build up the deserted agricultural lands laid waste by the ravages of the Thirty Years' War. For many years, however, these remained in straitened circumstances here in spite of the help received from their Dutch brethren, and the welcome from the tolerant count.

From a series of letters written to Amsterdam from the Palatinate in 1671 by the Mennonites themselves, we catch a glimpse of the suffering and hardships which were theirs during these trying times. In a letter dated April 7, 1671, it is said of the Swiss,

they are daily hunted with constables and as many as they can get taken as prisoners to the city of Bern so that four weeks ago about forty, men and women, were in confinement there. They have also scourged some, and banished them from the country, one of whom arrived here. They also scourged a minister of the word, and then conducted him out of the country, into Burgundy, where, when they arrived there, they first branded him, and let him go among the Walloons. However, as he could talk with no one, he had to go about three days with his burnt body, before his wounds were dressed, and he obtained some refreshments, being in such a condition that when they undressed him for binding up his wounds, the matter ran down his back, as a brother who helped dress him told me himself.

In May it is reported—

The magistrates at Bern caused six of the prisoners, among whom was a man with nine children to be fastened to a chain and sold for the Sea, to be used as galley slaves between Milan and Malta.

### **Causes of Persecution**

It may perhaps not be amiss here to suggest a few

reasons for this persecuting zeal throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries on the part of the Bernese and other Swiss cantonal authorities in the land of reputed civil and religious liberty long after milder measures had been adopted in less democratic countries. Nowhere else did Mennonites at this time suffer such indignities as in Switzerland. In Holland and Prussia they were enjoying a large degree of liberty. Even in the Palatinate during the eighteenth century, under intolerant Catholic counts, they enjoyed greater freedom, restricted though they were occasionally in their civil and religious privileges. The church for a time joined the state in a combined effort to drive Mennonitism out of existence. Public debates were held with Mennonite leaders by the Reformed clergy throughout this period in an attempt to convince the former of the supposed errors of their way. Questions of theology, however, played a minor part in these debates; for both sides recognized that in fundamental theological doctrines they had much in common. Even Breitingen, the Reformed leader in Zurich in the early seventeenth century, suggested that they agreed on all points in which *die Seligkeit gelegen ist*.

The questions to which the clergymen always demanded an answer in either debate or trial were—Why did the Mennonites refuse to attend the state church, refuse to have their children baptized, insist on performing their own marriage ceremonies, and set up their own worship? In other words why did they not conform? The charge against them was that of separatism, always a serious charge under the state-church system the world over in the days before state and church were separated. The Swiss church was not unique among the state ecclesiastical systems of the day in its attempt to stamp out non-conformity, and

its measures to bring about that result perhaps not much more barbaric than those adopted by our own Puritan commonwealth during these identical years in hanging the Quakers.

One answer which the Mennonites usually gave to the first question disturbed both the clergy and state authorities not a little. The former refused to attend the established church, they said, because of the worldly life of the clergy, and the low moral standards of many of the members. Recognizing the charge as one of the potent causes of the continued existence of the Mennonite movement, as well as frequent dissatisfaction among the people at large, the state clergy held frequent synods to discuss means and proper remedies for raising the moral level of the whole ecclesiastical leadership. That Mennonites themselves lived on a high moral and spiritual plane is evidenced by the almost universal testimony of even their most persistent enemies during all these centuries.

From a Reformed clergyman who wrote in 1693, we have this interesting description —

they are reputed to be true Christians, but observe strictly those practises which are peculiar to the Anabaptists, and which distinguish them from us as follows—they do not attend our church because of the presence of so many sinners among us; do not observe the Lord's Supper with us; they establish their own churches; they do not baptize their children; do not take an oath, nor go to law; they do not go to war; nor occupy positions of honor nor hold civil office; they wear simple clothes, do not wear a collar about the neck, nor adorn themselves with lace and ruffles or anything that might savor of pride or extravagance; they speak slowly, and sing in a low, soft voice, and constantly keep their eyes fixed on the ground; they have little to do with those of high station, and avoid the clergymen; they seldom visit the taverns, and do not attend baptismal or marriage feasts; they do not often attend markets, and do little trading

and buying; they are willing to suffer persecution; they are industrious and appear among the people as living a simple, pure and honest life.

The writer, after describing the virtues of the Menonites, then goes on to advise his own people to follow the example of these pious folk. It should be remembered, too, that since the Mennonites were the only free church in the land—this was before the day of modern free churches on the continent, Baptist, Congregationalists, Methodists, etc.,—they drew down upon their heads the whole concentrated wrath of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, against any attempt at separatism. They alone stood for separation of church and state, and they were a very small body, but they taught a dangerous doctrine for the perpetuity of the state religious system.

It was not primarily to the Swiss church however, but rather to the secular authorities to whom the Menonites owed their bitter experiences. The causes of persecution, especially in the latter centuries, were political rather than religious, although pastor and magistrate were usually linked together in the mandates as proper persons with whom complaints against the Menonites might be lodged, it was the state that took the initiative in all punitive measures.

The usual excuse given by the Bernese Council, when forced by outside public opinion to justify its harsh measures, was that Mennonites refused to take the oath of allegiance, and that they refused to perform military service. When confronted with the suggestion that Menonites in other lands held similar beliefs without serious consequences, the council replied that the Swiss cantons, unlike other countries, depended not on mercenary armies for defence but upon a national militia. In this military policy largely no doubt, is to be found the reason for



the persistent hounding of the Mennonites in Switzerland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

### **Refusal to Become Conscripts**

Armies in Europe at this time were small, and composed of professional soldiers, who made soldiering a business, and fought for pay, plunder and excitement rather than for a worthy cause. It was not difficult usually to keep the thin army ranks filled; and conscription, consequently, was little known before the Napoleonic wars in France. It was not difficult, therefore, for such as had scruples against war to escape military service, sometimes at the expense of other service. Especially was this true under the autocracies of the time. Thus Mennonites in the eighteenth century enjoyed military exemption not only in Holland, but also in Prussia, the Palatinate, Austria, Bavaria, Russia and in nearly every other land in which they were found except in Switzerland. It is only in democracies that special groups find it hard to secure unusual privileges. Democracies are inclined to show little patience with the conscientious scruples of minorities.

It must not be inferred, however, that the Swiss Mennonite policy had its roots in democratic institutions; for the Swiss cantons were democracies in name only. The number of ruling families represented in the oligarchic councils of Bern were but a few. It was not democracy, but the autocratic military system, as just indicated, that lay at the bottom of all these troubles for the Mennonites. To be perfectly honest, too, the apologists for the Swiss policy of oppression should not have justified the course of the state authorities on the plea that the Mennonites refused to defend the fatherland; for defence of the fatherland was not the use to which

conscripted soldiers were usually put. They were used to fill the pockets of ruling noblemen, rather than for common defence. Throughout all the wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Switzerland was a favorite recruiting ground for mercenary soldiers for all the wars of the time. They served on both sides in every conflict, and Swiss were pitted against Swiss on every battlefield of Europe. The army of Louis XIV in the War of the Palatinate contained thousands of Swiss soldiers, and it was largely to these Swiss troops that Louis owed his overwhelming victories in that campaign of devastation.

This vicious system of furnishing troops for pay to other rulers was an old practise in Switzerland, dating far back beyond the Reformation days, and extending up to the time of the French Revolution. It is needless to say that the system found much bitter opposition among all the common people, regardless of religious beliefs, on economic and social grounds. Mennonites, however, opposed war because of a deep religious conviction. But since their example would encourage others to take a firmer stand against the practise, Mennonites must either give up their convictions or be driven out of the land. It is worthy of notice that persecution was most bitter during the period of European wars in the latter part of the seventeenth and the early part of the eighteenth centuries, when profits for letting out mercenary soldiers were at the maximum.

Although Mennonites believed governments to be divinely ordained and as such to be accorded implicit obedience in all things except where religious convictions were concerned, yet their refusal to take an oath of any sort, including the oath of allegiance on account of religious scruples, was often misinterpreted by the

governing authorities as an act of civil disobedience and of disloyalty. At the same time under the feudal system which still prevailed in Switzerland, the peasant class especially, was living under considerable economic and social oppression. The charges made by the Mennonites against the prevailing order on religious grounds often was not much different from those made by peasants at large on economic grounds. And so, the ruling authorities, ever fearful of losing their positions of power and influence, did not always stop to draw a fine distinction between the motives of the peaceloving, non-resistant Mennonites who refused to take the oath on religious grounds, and the leaders of peasant revolts whose refusal to perform the same act was a sign of armed rebellion against constituted authority. Mennonite persecution frequently followed in the wake of peasant uprisings. Mennonite ministers and rebel leaders were sometimes executed together. There is no doubt but that the peasants often sympathized with the Mennonites in the attempts of the latter to establish their own form of worship. In 1714, several *Täufer-Jäger* were set upon by a mob of some sixty peasants of Sumiswald, and severely beaten when they attempted to arrest a number of Mennonites for refusal to attend the state church.

### The Amish

Unfortunately the same strong spirit of individualism which inspired these men and women to face death rather than violate their religious convictions, also frequently led them to hair splitting arguments over unimportant questions of policy and practise. One such quarrel took place in Bern in 1693, soon after the exodus just mentioned, among those who remained. Most of the church quarrels in history can be traced to the peculiar notions of some strong-willed individual who

can see but one side of a controversial question. And so it was here.

Jacob Amman was the name of a young minister whose exact local field of labor, whether in the Bernese *Oberland*, or Alsace, is not known definitely. A few years later his Swiss following came from the upland section of the Canton of Bern, although Jacob himself was a resident of Alsace as early as 1696, if not earlier. Amman may have been one of the Swiss exiles to Alsace during the great migration of some twenty years earlier. The fact that the whole Alsatian church finally accepted his leadership, while his following in Switzerland was much smaller would suggest that his home at the time may have been Alsace. He was a young man of decided opinions and evidently of an aggressive personality with conservative leanings. He conceived the notion that not all was well with the Mennonites of Switzerland, and proposed, according to one of the chroniclers of this controversy, to "restore the temple of God upon the old foundation." The main charge against the church seemingly was laxness of discipline—and especially the failure to apply the *Meidung* to excommunicated members—a practise advocated in the conservative Dutch Confession of Dordrecht, adopted by the Alsations in 1660, and no doubt well known also in Switzerland, but not followed in this and several other practises by the Swiss church of that day.

*Meidung* or Avoidance, it will be remembered was not a new doctrine—having been taught and practised by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, and certain sections of the Dutch church, with disastrous results. Jacob Amman now demanded its rigid observance also in the Swiss church, where evidently its use hitherto had been unknown. Together with several other ministers, whom he had seemingly converted to his point of view, he set out

upon a tour, in 1693, through the various Swiss congregations in the interests of his new idea. The Alsatians as well as the congregations in the *Oberland*, seemingly went over to the new camp in a body; but with the *Emmentaler*, those who lived in the Emmental, in the general region of Langnau, Amman had little success. Losing patience with the ministers here, in the course of a visit among them, because they would not agree with him on this question, he placed them all under the ban. These in turn, under the leadership of one Hans Reist, returned the compliment and banned the Amman party, thus starting a division that has just recently been ended in Europe, but is still alive in America. The quarrel was carried into the Palatinate and elsewhere wherever Swiss emigrants went.

A lively correspondence was kept up between the leaders of the two factions for some years, which now furnishes us with our only source of information on the subject, and in which we find that numerous uncomplimentary adjectives and hard names were bandied back and forth, especially by Amman which we may as well forget now; for that was not a day of "sweetness and light"; Luther did not use polite language either. A little later the *Ammansch* party also adopted foot washing as a church practise, although that was not at first an issue in dispute; and the observance of communion twice each year instead of once as had been the custom heretofore.

Amman likely also found fault with some of the new social customs and practises that threatened to creep into the church at this time, and against which he evidently thought the Reist party was not sufficiently on its guard; for in a letter written by himself there are hints of fancy clothes, shaving of the beard, wearing long hair, and attending funerals in the state church. Hooks and eyes were not an issue at the time, for both factions



in Switzerland used this archaic means of holding their clothes together until well into the nineteenth century.

In fact the whole movement was one toward a strict observance of the older customs, or at least a crystallization of the customs and practises then current, a sort of Chinese worship of the past, and of suspicion of all innovations in the affairs of every-day living as well as in forms of church worship; an ever present fear of the dangers of "worldliness." This spirit of conservatism did not grow mellow with age. The old was seldom discarded for the new in styles of dress as these changed during the centuries. And so hooks and eyes were retained instead of buttons; shoestrings instead of buckles; and belts instead of suspenders, long after these once common articles of wearing apparel had been discarded by the folks at large. Beards, too, and long hair once merely a common custom, acquired a religious significance, and became the object of constant solicitude on the part of the church fathers.

As already indicated nearly all the Mennonites in Alsace and in France in course of time, as well as a small group in the Palatinate were of the Amish wing of the denomination. The Jura *Oberland* congregations emigrated to Holland in 1711, and others to Alsace and Neuchatel so that few remained in Bern. All these congregations have since lost their old time character and are no longer to be distinguished from other Mennonites; but in America there are still a number of large settlements scattered throughout Pennsylvania and the states of the Mississippi Valley where some of the ancient customs and practises prevailing in Switzerland in the days of Jacob Amman are still observed.

### **Renewed Persecution**

Unfortunately the exodus of 1671 did not end the

story of persecution in Bern, though it had practically extirpated the Mennonite faith in Zurich and some of the other Swiss cantons. Not all of the Mennonites left the canton at that time. Some of those who did, later returned. The policy of annihilation continued. In 1688 the War Council suggested frequent military musters; that all men be required to wear swords when appearing in public places; and that oaths of allegiance be taken every six years. Mennonites by refusing to comply with these regulations could then be easily identified. In 1690, the Great Council ordered that all children of Mennonite parentage be disinherited if the latter did not conform to the state church. In 1695 the fundamental law was laid down that one's usual civil obligations could not be evaded because of religious views. By 1709 the prisons of Bern were again full.

In the meantime more efficient machinery was perfected for handling the whole Mennonite problem. A special commission called the *Täufer-Kammer*, (Mennonite Commission) was organized to deal exclusively with the whole question; *Täufer-Jäger* (Mennonite Hunters) made up usually of the common rowdies of the community, were set to the task of spying out the suspects and haling them before the magistrates; the *Täufer-Gut* (Mennonite Fund) made up from the confiscations of Mennonite property, and at first used to defray the expenses of the whole persecution process, but later turned over to the state church for school and church. Every effort was put forth to attract the persecuting officials with alluring bribes to the unpopular business of rounding up harmless Mennonites. To the "Hunters" was awarded thirty kreutzer for every ordinary suspect placed under arrest. Ministers brought a higher price—one hundred thaler.

But none of these drastic measures had thus far proven successful in stamping out the Mennonite movement. No matter with what harsh punishment the Mennonites were threatened, they repeatedly returned to be with their families or spend their last days on their native soil. It now occurred to the Commission to try a plan which had been under consideration for some time, that of disposing of the fifty-six prisoners, which included no doubt the most conscientious and thus most troublesome of the leaders, by deporting them to America or some other far off land from which return would be extremely unlikely. The time for this experiment seemed propitious. It was the year when all South Germany and Switzerland was aflame with the Pennsylvania fever. Some ten thousand Palatines had collected this year, 1709, in London, hoping to be transported at the Queen's expense to the "Paradise of America." Why not send these troublesome Mennonites along? So thought the Commission; and the Council agreed.

Arrangements were accordingly made with a certain George Ritter, a sort of colonization agent then stationed at Bern, to take charge of the proposed expedition. For every Mennonite successfully landed across the seas, Ritter was to receive the sum of forty-five thaler. He started down the Rhine on March 18, 1710, with his Mennonite prisoners and a group of other unwelcome citizens whom he was to accompany to the Graffenried colony just being established in the Carolinas, at the request of the Bernese authorities.

### **An Emigration Project that Miscarried**

In the meantime since the Rhine flows across numerous political boundaries on its way to the sea, it was necessary for Ritter to secure a series of passports for his human cargo, usually not a difficult matter, and no

trouble was anticipated here. But the Council of Bern had not sufficiently taken into account the political influence of the Dutch Mennonites at The Hague in their deportation schemes. These latter had never ceased to interest themselves in the fate of their Swiss brethren. A special relief commission had been formed to aid the Swiss with necessary funds to carry on their struggle for existence, and to intercede for them with the Swiss governments. When the Dutch heard that a group of Swiss Mennonites were being deported down the Rhine to a foreign land against their will, they immediately used their influence successfully with the States General to prevent the passage of the Ritter expedition through Dutch territory. St. Saphorin, the Swiss representative at The Hague, was assured by the President of the States General that Holland, being a free country, the Mennonites as soon as they reached Dutch soil would be at liberty to go where they pleased in spite of the fifteen guards which Ritter had with him. Evidently the representatives of other countries also interceded at The Hague with the Swiss ambassador for milder treatment of the Mennonites; for the former, in a letter to his home government, said he would rather "contend against the representatives of all the combined powers except England, than against the Mennonites alone."

Lord Townsend, the English ambassador to Holland, whose interest St. Saphorin hoped to enlist, since the prisoners were destined for British territory, informed the Swiss representative that England wanted only voluntary immigrants, and not deported prisoners in her colonies. William Penn, who hoped that these refugees might settle on his own lands, and who had written Townsend to help Ritter to secure passage through Holland for "fifty or sixty Swissers called Mennonites coming from Holland in order to go for Penn Sylvania" evidently

did not know that these "Swissers" were religious exiles being deported from their native land against their will.

St. Saphorin was convinced by this time that free passage to the mouth of the Rhine was impossible, and he so informed Ritter. But the latter was already on his way; nothing was left for the latter but to release his prisoners along the route. Twenty-eight had already been left at Mannheim because of sickness and infirmities. When those who remained on the boat asked permission at Nijmwegen, near the Dutch border, to visit their brethren in this town, Ritter did not object. They never returned to the boat. And so ended another attempt of the Bernese government to solve this troublesome religious problem.

The failure of the Bernese to rid themselves of their Mennonite prisoners as they had planned, even though they had transported them temporarily across the border, did not lighten the burden of those Mennonites who remained. The harrying process continued, and soon another set of prisoners had been accumulated, some of them undoubtedly returned exiles from the Ritter expedition. The Dutch Mennonites, in the meantime, continued their efforts to solve the problem and bring relief to their Swiss brethren. They even promised to furnish money with which to buy substitutes or make good any financial loss entailed by the refusal of the Swiss Mennonites to enter military service. But they were informed that substitutes would not be permitted where universal service was the rule. It finally became evident to all the parties concerned that there was only one permanent solution of the question—wholesale emigration of all the Mennonites, not only the prisoners, of their own accord, with their families and possessions, to a land of their own choosing. And to bring this about, the *Dutch Commission for Foreign Needs* now worked with un-



flagging zeal urging both the Swiss Mennonites and the Bernese government to cooperate to this end.

This should not have been a difficult task; for the authorities were anxious to rid themselves of the Mennonites, and the latter were even more concerned about finding a place of refuge. But it proved more difficult than at first it seemed.

First of all, the Bern Council wanted to be assured that none of the Mennonites, if transported elsewhere, would ever return to Swiss soil. But while they were anxious to get rid of troublesome non-conformists, they did not wish to part with the Reformed wives and husbands and children, of whom there were a number even in Mennonite circles. Military efficiency, and economic well-being in those days of wars, pestilences, and famines depended upon maintaining a growing population. There was no over-population problem at that time. Most of the countries of middle Europe discouraged emigration with heavy emigration taxes, and some of them threatened with heavy punishment any colonization agent who tried to lure citizens from their native land. There is on record at least one case of a Swiss *Neuländer*, the name in Switzerland for colonization agent, who was put to death as late as the eighteenth century for his activities in this direction. Non-Mennonite members of the family of a Mennonite exile consequently were not permitted to accompany the latter. Property, too, being confiscated, the exiles were sent out into the world empty handed.

In this latter fact is to be found a partial explanation at least for the repeated return of Mennonite exiles to their native land even in the face of threats of dire consequences,—the desire to see their families and possess their property. Then, too, not to be overlooked is the missionary zeal which dominates the life of every deeply

religious people. Switzerland was the land of Mennonite origins; and many were concerned that the faith should not die out here. Benedikt Brechtbühl, a leading minister among the Swiss, in exile at the time in the Palatinate, was sorry to learn in a letter from one of his brethren that

die Bruderschaft in der Schweiz es niet fuer gut halten  
das Ich das Haerdli Christi nicht haelfe zu bauen, und ver-  
meinen Ich soellte das voelckli niet verlassen.

Then, too, the uncertainty of their destination made the Mennonites slow to consent to any plan of emigration. Finally, however, by 1711, the Dutch had worked out a satisfactory agreement with the government at Bern for the withdrawal of the whole Mennonite population. The prisoners were to be set free; the emigrants could settle wherever they pleased except in the neighboring canton of Neuchatel, at that time under Prussian rule; to sell their property and take the proceeds with them, as well as the non-Mennonite members of their families without paying the usual emigration tax, the one condition being that all Mennonites must promise never to return. Religious meetings in the meantime were to be prohibited. The Dutch Mennonites were to assume the responsibility of seeing that these provisions were fulfilled. J. L. Runckel, the Dutch ambassador at Bern was commissioned with the task of carrying out the whole program.

It seems strange that a people so despised as were the Mennonites in Switzerland should at the same time be so welcomed by nearly all the other nations of middle Europe. The reason for this is to be found, of course, in their skill as farmers and their ability to bring returns from thin soil which others less industrious often found so barren that they could not even scratch out a bare existence from it. When it became known that some five hun-

dred peace-loving religious refugees were about to be driven from their native Swiss homes because of their religious beliefs, half a score of nations vied with each other in an effort to secure them for their own sparsely populated lands. Both the prince of Nassau and the count of Neuwied wanted skilled workmen and expert craftsmen to settle in their towns; but since the Swiss were nearly all small farmers and dairymen, they could not qualify. The king of Denmark was interested in having them settle on his lands. The Palatinate, too, was open. The Queen of England had a special representative in Switzerland advertising the attractions of the Crown colonies for prospective settlers; but America seemingly received slight consideration from the main body of Swiss Mennonites at this time. Ambassador Runckel, who threw himself wholeheartedly into the task of rescuing the unfortunate Mennonites from their dilemma had a suggestion of his own. Why could not the Bernese government grant religious toleration to the Mennonites on condition that they settle as a body on the waste swamp lands in the northern part of the canton? This proposal however, received serious consideration from no one except Runckel himself. Even if Bern had perchance agreed, the cost to the Mennonites of reclaiming these swamps, according to Benedikt Brechtbühl would have been prohibitive.

More plausible seemed the proposition that came from the king of Prussia, Frederick William I. This thrifty king who took a keen interest in the whole emigration project from the first, wrote repeatedly to his ambassador at The Hague, urging that the Mennonites settle anywhere on his lands where he promised substantial advantages "far beyond anything they could hope to gain from Holland." Especially did the king urge them to locate in East Prussia not far from where thriving Dutch Men-

nonite colonies had existed for over a century, and where a recent pestilence killed off many of the inhabitants, leaving lands, houses, stock and equipment all of which the Mennonites might have almost for the asking. Benedikt Brechtbühl headed a special commission which investigated the lands in question, and had an interview with the king's representative at Potsdam. Although Brechtbühl himself was enthusiastic about the project, few of the Swiss took advantage of this generous offer, fearing, so they said, the possibility of another plague; and displeased, too, with the institution of serfdom which still prevailed here. It was finally decided by those in charge of the emigration project to lead the expedition to Holland, and leave the matter of final destination to later consideration. A little later, however, a small group, with the help of the Hamburg and Danzig Mennonites, located in East Prussia; but these, after some years of heavy taxation, and because later Prussian kings sometimes forgot their earlier promises of military exemption, were again forced to leave their new home.

## Exiled

Preparations for the voyage down the Rhine, under the direction of Ambassador Runckel, were pushed vigorously during the early months of the year of 1711. Five boats were constructed at Basel to carry the party down the river. After much effort on the part of Runckel and the Dutch committee at Amsterdam, it seemed for a time that the whole scheme would fail because of the opposition of the Swiss Mennonites themselves. The final success must be attributed almost entirely to the infinite patience and the unwearying endeavors of the Dutch ambassador. There were several reasons for the reluctance of the Swiss Mennonites to give the project their whole-hearted support. First, in view of an experience

of over a century and a half of persecution suffered under the rule of the Bernese government they were suspicious of promises made by the latter for the future. Some hesitated to sign the agreement never to return to Switzerland; for in spite of the agreement made between the Dutch ambassador and the government of Bern, there were still several uncertainties in the way;—the status of the non-Mennonite members of the families who preferred to remain behind, as well as of the children; the property rights of each in case of divided families; and the question as to whether the general amnesty promised also applied to all the ministers, some of whom were already in exile.

Especially disappointing to Runckel was the feeling of bitterness still existing between the Amish and Reist parties. The Amish in the *Oberland* seemed willing enough to emigrate and cooperate to that end, but the Reist faction in the *Emmental* refused to comply with the demands of the Dutch ambassador until compelled to do so, after repeated delays. The fact that the latter contained most of the prisoners whose status was less certain than that of the others may account partly for this reluctance; but the religious bitterness still existing between the two parties which had mutually banned each other, to which the Amish also added avoidance, made a whole-hearted cooperation in any common enterprise extremely distasteful. But Runckel displayed infinite tact and patience, and finally rounded up most of them.

The expedition, under the leadership of the same Ritter who had led the fifty-six prisoners of the year before, left Basel on July 13. Of the five hundred whom it was supposed would constitute the cargo, less than four hundred reported, and one of the five boats which had been constructed was left at Basel. Even the most coura-



geous of them left their cruel but yet beloved native land with many a heartache. The following description of the departure of the flotilla of exiles, by the well-known historian of the Bernese Mennonites, Ernst Mueller, though drawn more heavily from the writer's imagination than from any authentic document, yet may not be far from a true account, as they drifted down the Rhine and their homes disappeared behind the Cathedral spires of Basel, and the wooded hills of the Jura.

Seated upon the chests and bundles which were piled up in the middle of the vessels were the grey-headed men and women, old and weak. On the sides were the young people watching with delight and wonder the shifting scenery of the banks as they glided by. Now hopeful, now troubled, they cast questioning glances to the north, and then with longing eyes they again turned their faces to the south in the direction of their beloved homes which they were leaving forever, the homes which had so basely exiled them, and yet the homes whose green hills and silver tipped mountains they could not forget. And when overcome with sorrow, someone began a song which comforted them.

*O Herr, wir thun dich bitten  
Richt unser Herz und Gemueth  
Nach deinem heiligen Wort  
Durch deine grosse Guet.*

*Zuend du in unsern Herzen  
Eine reine Liebe an  
Thu fuer uns wachen und streiten  
Sonst moegen wir nit bestahn.*

Most of the Reist party deserted as they had opportunity in the early stages of the voyage down the Rhine to seek their friends and brethren in the Palatinate. And so it was mainly the Amish party, about three hundred and forty in number, that finally arrived at Amsterdam on August 3, where they were cordially received by their Dutch brethren, and all their wants provided for until they could find a permanent location.

The Dutch Mennonites were most generous in their support of these Swiss exiles with their strange customs and foreign dialect. First, the new-comers were distributed temporarily among the congregations at Deventer, Harlingen and Groningen, and substantial sums of money were collected to help them get a new start in life on small farms. A small group of the Reist followers, who seemingly had accompanied the party unwillingly all the way to Holland, after a temporary stay at Deventer later found their way back again to the Palatinate. But the major part of the expedition, the Amish group, were gathered together in the course of a few years and located near Groningen and Kampen, where they organized several separate congregations. Within ten years these had become self supporting, and no longer needed the help of their generous Dutch brethren.

For nearly two hundred years these congregations kept up their independent existence; although in a Dutch geographical environment, they had more ecclesiastical affiliation with their Swiss and Palatinate Amish brethren than with the native Dutch Mennonites. For many years they kept up their Swiss-Amish forms—the Swiss dialect, hooks and eyes, long hair, beards, broad brimmed hats, foot washing, two witnesses to every sermon, kneeling in prayer, singing from the *Ausbund*, and other old customs and practises still in vogue today to the letter in isolated communities in Pennsylvania and Kansas among the simon-pure American Old Order Amish. At first the native Dutch found these strange people with their foreign customs of great interest. Native curiosity, it is said, was so great sometimes that local police occasionally found it necessary to keep the crowds away from the doors of their meeting places during the hours of worship.

We know very little of the later history of these con-

gregations except a few facts gleaned from a letter written in 1765 by Hans Naffziger, an Amish bishop from the Palatinate, who had visited them in that year. By that time these Dutch Swiss Amish evidently had fallen into evil ways religiously. Naffziger reports to his home congregation in the Palatinate that the Dutch churches had developed a division in their ranks some years before, no doubt the result of an attempt to maintain their old time Swiss customs in a progressive Dutch environment, and that for six years now there had been no baptisms, no communion, and no marriage ceremonies in the church; many young people had forsaken the faith; they lacked competent preachers, and it was impossible to persuade young men to accept ministerial responsibilities. For a time there was a division into the New and the Old Swiss. Later visits from the Palatinate evidently revived the old church. It was not until the middle of the nineteenth century however, that the Amish here gave up their separate existence, and merged into the general Dutch Mennonite body. No one now would suspect their Swiss Amish origin except for their Swiss names. One would have little difficulty in recognizing *Leutcher* as Swiss *Latschar*; *Ricken* as *Rich*; *Root* as *Ruth*; *Leendertz* for *Leenders*; *Lutwyler* for *Litweiler*; and *Gauwetzy* for *Gautschy*, many familiar Amish names still found in Woodford County, Illinois, and Fulton County, Ohio.

But strange to say the end of this weary story of persecution was not even yet. Some of the Swiss exiles returned, as already noticed; others never left. These now again became the objects of a most bitter attack on the part of the Bernese Council. All the old mandates were vigorously enforced. There were still about one hundred families left who refused either to conform or be driven out. Upon these now the Bernese government

turned with renewed bitterness. All Mennonites were again ordered to be cast into prison. Rewards were offered for their arrest, fifteen crowns for a woman, thirty for a man, and one hundred for a minister. Secret meetings were prohibited, and no one was permitted to give Mennonites any assistance. One man was fined a large sum for shielding his own wife. Reformed parents must disinherit Mennonite children. The installation of a minister was punishable with a heavy fine. Returned exiles were threatened with a galley sentence. In 1715 and again in 1718, several men were condemned to that fate, though due to popular protests from the Dutch States General and local popular opinion, the sentence was never carried out. At one time there were over forty Mennonites in prison. In 1742 even an Amishman from Holland, visiting his relatives in Bern, was cast into prison for a time. In 1734 the *Täufer* council appointed several special agents to scour the community for Mennonites. But it is not necessary to continue this tale of woe. The story of the early eighteenth century does not differ much from that of the seventeenth. It was not until the close of the century, when the liberalizing influences of the French Revolution permeated all Europe that democratic Switzerland reached the state of religious toleration attained by the Dutch two hundred years earlier.

### TOLERATION GRANTED

In 1799 the Helvetian Republic passed an act of toleration granting religious liberty to every faith, and permitting those who had been banished for the sake of their religious beliefs to return. But even this act of toleration, while it ended active persecution, yet did not place the Mennonites on an equal footing with the state church. Baptism and marriage were still regarded as

civil and religious rites to be administered only by the state church. In 1810 the Emmental congregation requested that their own baptismal and marriage ceremonies be recognized as valid and final. But the authorities refused the request, and the next year all Mennonite children who had remained unbaptized since 1798, twenty-seven in all, were ordered to submit to the rite at the hands of the state church. The Mennonites could then rebaptize again if they so desired, the authorities declared, and they might repeat the marriage ceremonies according to their own customs. The spirit of the times was growing too liberal, however, for enforcing such regulations. When the Mennonites refused to bring their children to the Reformed churches for baptism, they were led unwillingly to the baptismal font by the local police. Even the state clergy, recognizing this procedure as a travesty upon religion, objected to its continuation.

Finally in 1815, after a long and bitter struggle of nearly three hundred years, the Mennonites in the canton of Bern were granted complete religious toleration with full rights of citizenship. Instead of the oath a hand-clasp was permitted. In lieu of military service they were granted the right of furnishing money for a substitute.

Just about the time the Swiss Mennonites were granted full religious toleration many of them decided to emigrate of their own free choice to that land of opportunity to which their forbears had refused to be deported one hundred years earlier. Most of these came from the Jura settlements, but some also from the Emmental.

### **The Jura Settlement**

The Jura spoken of here consists of that part of the canton of Bern on the French side of the Jura hills, which



up to 1815 had composed the bishopric of Basel, but since then incorporated into the canton of Bern. Along these hills, often in out-of-the-way places, and on hitherto unproductive mountain sides, Mennonite exiles, at first from Alsace, but later largely from Bern, had been invited all through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to settle as tenants on the estates of wealthy noblemen, where because of their economic worth they were offered protection against religious persecution by the ruling bishops. Here by hard work and plain living they eked out a comfortable existence, and greatly increased the income to their landlords from their meager lands.

It was perhaps only natural that their more shiftless French neighbors should envy these German speaking, industrious Mennonite farmers their greater prosperity, and seemingly better reputation among the noblemen of the community. Frequent complaints were lodged against them with the ruling authorities, and demands that they be driven from their holdings. It is interesting to note that these charges were usually economic, not religious or political. In 1731 the French peasants in one local Mennonite community complained that the Mennonites monopolized all the work of the community, and by using up the wood in the local forests for their cheese making, greatly raised the cost of living for all. Later it was charged that by taking care of their own poor and orphans, and settling their own disputes among themselves without going to law, and helping one another in time of need they separated themselves from the rest of society and thus formed a dangerous self-governing local unit—a state within a state.

Usually these complaints fell on deaf ears. Well-satisfied landlords and thrifty bishops were seldom willing to exchange industrious and successful German Men-

nonite farmers and dairymen, for lazy Frenchmen, though Catholic. With a few exceptions the Mennonites of the Jura enjoyed comparative religious toleration, under the rule of the bishops of Basel, although all through the centuries individuals and small groups migrated to America and into France mainly for economic reasons. By 1798 it was estimated by a local traveller through the bishopric that the Mennonites numbered about eight hundred souls in this region, centered largely about two large congregations—*Sonnenberg* and *Münsterberg*. It was from this region that most of the Swiss emigrants to America came in the first half of the nineteenth century.

### **The American Emigration**

This emigration movement during the first half of the past century not only of Swiss, but also of Alsatian and South German Mennonites, was the result of several causes. Most important perhaps was the spirit of militarism which prevailed throughout this part of Europe during the Napoleonic wars, and the feeling of unrest, which the Mennonites feared would break out in further conflict, ultimately making it impossible for them to maintain their non-resistant principles. In some cases equally strong were the economic motives. The Jura Swiss especially, were decidedly poor by this time. Not being permitted to buy land of their own, they were merely tenants on long-term leases. Some did not even own a horse, being compelled to do all their labor by hand, assisted occasionally by the family cow. A goodly number were forced to practise some sort of avocation with their farming, such as weaving, shoemaking, or cabinet making, in order to eke out an existence. Families were large, and the small farms could not take care of the increased population. Just at this time, 1815-1820, times

were especially hard. As a result of the war, prices were high. Rents were increasing. Black bread and potatoes was the only food for many. Meat could be afforded only on special occasions. Even butter and eggs were scarce. But now a few crop failures had reduced some of the poorer people to actual want. One of the early immigrants to America, somewhat of a rhymster describes the situation at the time in a bit of verse

*Hier in dem Schwiezerland,  
Wie Allen ist bekannt,  
Hoert man viel Klagen;  
Weil so viel arme Luet,  
Die z'keine Zeute nuet  
Heu z' saeme tragen.*

These were the conditions that made the Swiss at this time turn their eyes to America—still the land of milk and honey.

The Swiss pioneer who led this movement was one Benedikt Schrag, who in 1817 settled in Wayne county, Ohio. He was followed before 1860 by many from both the Jura and the Emmental, who located in large colonies in Wayne, Putnam and Allen counties, Ohio, and in Adams county, Indiana.

### **Neu-Taeufer**

It was during the time of this emigration, too, that another church dispute arose resulting in the creation of a new sect locally known as *Neu-Täufers*. This sect was organized by a Samuel Fröhlich, between 1832 and 1835, in Aargau and in the Emmental. Fröhlich had been a theological student in the Reformed church, but being cast out of that body for some reason in 1832, he decided to organize a church of his own. It was while he was engaged in this enterprise that he visited among the Mennonites in the Emmental. His visit here was well

timed for his purposes, for here, too, a quarrel was brewing under the leadership of two influential members of the congregation—Samuel Gerber and Christian Baumgartner. Gerber especially, who had just recently been installed as minister in the Emmental congregation by the elders of the Jura church, was ambitious to play an important role in his circle. Accusing his fellow ministers of a lack of religious zeal and of the want of all spiritual life, he introduced a series of changes in the church under his charge quite contrary to the practises then in vogue. Thus the soil was well prepared for the work of proselyting. Fröhlich, in bad repute among the clergy of the state church, was soon forced to leave his work in the Emmental due to pressure from the local police officials, but he sent a representative who was not slow to take advantage of the local quarrel, and added quite a number of the disaffected to the new following. Gerber and Baumgartner and their disciples, who had already introduced the practise of weekly communion services in their group, were somewhat reluctant at first to fellowship whole-heartedly with the Fröhlichites, because the latter insisted as a test of membership that all new members must submit to a rebaptism by immersion, since every other faith but theirs was a dead faith, and could not be recognized. No former baptisms consequently could be considered as valid. This was rather humiliating to men who had all along assumed a superior piety among their fellows; but they finally swallowed their pride, and in the course of a few months the new sect won over some sixty members from the Emmental congregation, as well as about an equal number from the state church.

*Neu-Täufer*, of course, is a name first applied to the followers of Fröhlich by his opponents. These former now soon developed an air of superior sanctity, and a

spirit of exclusiveness that set them apart from all other religious denominations. All others belonged to the "world" with whom there could be no religious fellowship whatever, and not too much of social, especially with former fellow believers. Salvation was possible only by way of the new road. "Salute no man by the Way" was applied literally to those not of their own faith, and especially to those from whom they had withdrawn. They bitterly denounced the old church and ridiculed the preachers as "babblers, preachers of a dead faith," etc.; and the members of these churches were all "spiritually dead." At first meetings were held every night after supposedly apostolic example. Communion was administered every Sabbath morning, while religious services were held in the afternoon. To the government they owed no allegiance except to pay their taxes. They considered it wrong to hold civil office. This was evidently the contribution of the Mennonite contingent to the new body.

Apostles of the new sect carried the division to America among their relatives and friends here. In 1846 several came to Ohio, where they established a small group of *Neu-Täufer* among the Mennonites of Wayne county; and later they appeared among the Amish in New York and Illinois, where they became locally known as "New Amish."

### Results of Persecution

The long years of persecution which the Swiss Mennonites suffered not only left its deep impress upon their souls and minds by engendering within them a spirit of submissive self depreciation from which they never fully recovered, but also greatly reduced their numbers. As a result of exile, emigration, defection, and withdrawal back into the state church, they have hardly held



their own, and are making but slight gains even now. The descendants of the seven or eight hundred exiles who crossed into the Palatinate between 1671 and 1711, only a part of whom later came to Pennsylvania, now number over one hundred thousand, while the descendants of those who remained in Switzerland and were saved for the Mennonite faith count up hardly more than fifteen hundred. Most of these are still found in the Jura region, with the largest congregation at Sonnenberg. The Emmental congregation numbers about three hundred members, with Langnau as its center. There are a few small settlements in Basel and Neuchatel.

At the time of the American emigration in the nineteenth century they had no meeting houses, services being held in the barns which were usually under the same roof as the houses, or in the open air in the summer season. Singing was *einstimmig*, and the *Ausbund* with its long hymns of thirty and forty stanzas still the accepted song book. Conservative customs and old styles of dress were still in vogue. Men wore short coats, knee breeches, hooks and eyes, and long beards, but none on the upper lip, because the mustache on the continent had a military significance. The women vied with the men in the simplicity of their clothes. Adornments of all sorts were forbidden. All worldly vanities were discouraged, even looking glasses being tabooed. But according to one writer of the time the fair young mountain maidens lost none of their charm by substituting for prohibited silk ribbons and flowers and feathers, ingeniously woven straw figures in their straw hats which they set jauntily upon their heads.

The same writer, a well-known German author of the period, after a visit through the Swiss Mennonite communities, pays these people a high tribute. He speaks of them as

a sturdy, strong race, true-hearted, peace-loving, conscientious and benevolent, beloved by all their neighbors, Catholics and Protestants alike. They live a life of such patriarchal simplicity that one cannot help loving them. Among them are found no drunkards, no gamblers, no loafers, no liars, no jealous neighbors. If perchance strife should arise among them, it is amicably settled by their elder. They help one another in busy seasons usually without pay. Their temperate, moderate habits assure them good health and long lives. Their conduct seems to be prompted by the one thought—"Keep God continually before your eyes."



Swiss Mennonite Family, by Aurele Robert

### Culture and Religion

Many of these customs of a century ago have since been discarded. But in fundamentals the Swiss are still among the most conservative of the European Mennonites. They still lead rather a secluded life engaged in small farming and dairying. Emmental cheese is famous the

world over. The Emmental settlement in recent years has perhaps been slightly less closed to outside influences than those in the Jura region. The exodus of 1711, and the persecutions which followed during the rest of the century nearly annihilated the Mennonite congregations here. For more than a hundred years after this they were without an elder of their own, the few scattered settlements being served in this capacity by the elders from the Jura. During the nineteenth century they were again revived, even receiving recruits from the Reformed church. Their present meeting house, arranged as a combination church building and parsonage, was erected in 1887. Up to that time all the Mennonite meetings in Switzerland were held at private homes alternately in various sections of the settlements. Walking was the chief means of travel, and for that reason the owner of the home where the meeting was held served dinner to the worshippers from a distance on that particular Sunday. The Emmental congregation now also holds its communion services once each month, and permits immersion to such applicants for baptism as desire it. With the neighboring Reformed state churches the Emmental congregation has been on good terms for a long time. In recent years it joined the state church thus arousing considerable concern among the other Mennonite congregations in Switzerland.

The Jura congregations being of Bernese extraction have clung tenaciously through all these centuries to their German language, although entirely in a French environment. They have maintained their own German schools, at their own expense in addition to the French schools maintained by public taxation. During World War I there was more or less of friction over this language and school question, although Switzerland herself was not directly engaged in the war. The congregations now

also have their own church houses although only in quite recent years.

The Swiss Mennonites are still semi-nonresistant, and are permitted by the government to do noncombatant military service. They wear the uniform when in training, and a small sword as a sign of their profession, but do not carry a gun. While the church is still inclined officially to uphold this pseudo-nonresistant position permitted by the government, yet the young men in their training, influenced by the growing militarism of the day, are going over more and more into full service. As in World War I Switzerland was again spared actual participation in the bloody struggle of World War II. However, the young men of draft age were called to military service. Most of the Mennonite young men chose non-combatant sanitary service in the army. Through contact with American Mennonites after World War II the question of non-resistance is again being more seriously discussed.

Of organized institutional life there is very little among the Swiss Mennonites. They have no special schools for training their ministers, though some of the younger members are taking advantage of the Chrischona Missionary and Bible Training School near Basel, and annual Bible institutes are now becoming popular in the different congregations during the winter months. Ministers are still selected by lot, with little preparation required for their calling. Although they have no mission posts of their own on the foreign field they have supported quite liberally in the past the mission work of both the American and Dutch churches, and have furnished some workers for these fields. The churches meet annually in a separate conference, and are in close touch with the work of neighboring churches in South Germany and Alsace-Lorraine. Their church paper, the

*Zionspilger*, was founded in 1882 by Samuel Bähler. The present editor of this small four-page weekly is Johann Rüfenacht, the minister of the Kehr, Langnau, congregation.

The Swiss Mennonites were not a literary folk and wrote but few books. But their famous old hymn book the *Ausbund* usually published at Zurich or Basel, the last time in 1839, went through many editions; and the well known old *Froschauer* Bible published at Zurich contemporaneously with Luther's own, was for centuries known as the *Täufer* Bible, and a forbidden book for all the Swiss Mennonites during the years of persecution. The most recent history of the Swiss Mennonites, *Die Taufgesinnten-Gemeinden*, by Samuel Geiser, a Mennonite preacher of the Jura, was published in 1931.

Influential among the Swiss Mennonites during the past century was Ulrich Steiner, affectionately referred to in approved Swiss fashion as *Steiner Uli*. He was born in 1806 at Trachselwald, and in 1830 was elected in the Emmental congregation by lot. Five years later he was ordained as an elder. For many years he served as the spiritual adviser of the scattered members of his flock, travelling extensively, or rather continually, in the interests of the church. His work was especially arduous during the *Neu-Täufer* controversy. He is the author of a small booklet, at one time frequently seen on the scanty book shelves of the American Swiss Mennonites, *Angenehme Stunden in Zion*. He died in 1877.

An influential leader among the Jura Mennonites during the latter half of the eighteenth century was a former minister whose surname is no longer known; but who was usually spoken of among his neighbors, though perhaps not among his own people, as *Täufer-Bänz*. He was a Bernese exile driven to the Jura hills soon after the middle of the century. Property-less and without the



means of support, he first settled with his family on a rented piece of ground so barren that no one expected him to extract a living from it; but which, through hard work and the self-sacrificing efforts of the whole family, he transformed, in the course of time, into a prosperous estate that became the envy of farmers far and wide.

Täufer-Bänz was not only a good farmer, however, but also an inspirational religious leader among his people as well. He travelled unceasingly over the Jura hills, visiting the various scattered Mennonite congregations, serving their spiritual needs, preaching, it is said, as long as three or four hours at a time, the most eloquent and self-sacrificial of all the Jura preachers. He was regarded as a man of considerable learning, unusually well-versed in the Bible, though likely not theologically trained. He was long remembered for his eloquence, philanthropy and worldly prosperity. Täufer-Bänz has almost become a legend today among the Jura Mennonites.

### **The Swiss Mennonites Today**

A depression which upset the Swiss economy between the years 1928-35 affected the Mennonite congregations considerably. Many families lost land which they had owned for generations. They either continued to live on the land as renters or moved to the industrial centers. Since that time a definite trend from the rural areas to the cities can be observed—quite a significant move considering the fact that the Swiss Mennonites have lived in the rural areas of the Alpine and Jura valleys for four centuries. The Sonnenberg congregation alone lost some twenty families in this manner during recent years. If this tendency continues it will mean that the Swiss Mennonites will have to become

much more aggressive and mission-minded in order to survive since their number has always been small.

The Mennonites of Switzerland live in Swiss-German and French speaking areas. The latter continued to maintain their Swiss-German cultural and Mennonite background by sending their children to their own schools. However, by moving into French speaking industrial areas in small numbers this became impossible and an adjustment to the Swiss-French environment was inevitable. Since 1938 the Swiss Mennonite conference has conducted youth activities, mostly in the hands of the older ministers. The committee has arranged annual youth conferences at Tramelan. Choirs and Sunday schools function in all congregations.

Two of the leading Swiss Mennonite ministers passed away recently. Samuel Nussbaumer, for many years chairman of the Swiss Mennonite conference, died in 1942, and Samuel Gerber in 1948. Younger men are taking their places. Samuel Geiser and Samuel Gerber, Jr., represented the Swiss Mennonites at the Mennonite World Conference in America in 1948. The Swiss Mennonites, even though few in number, helped their suffering brethren in France and Germany after World War II. Clothing and food were collected and shipped into needy areas and children from destroyed cities were taken into the homes of Swiss Mennonite families. At present the Swiss Mennonites have more contact with Mennonites abroad than they have had for many generations especially since the Mennonite Central Committee has established its European headquarters in Basel.

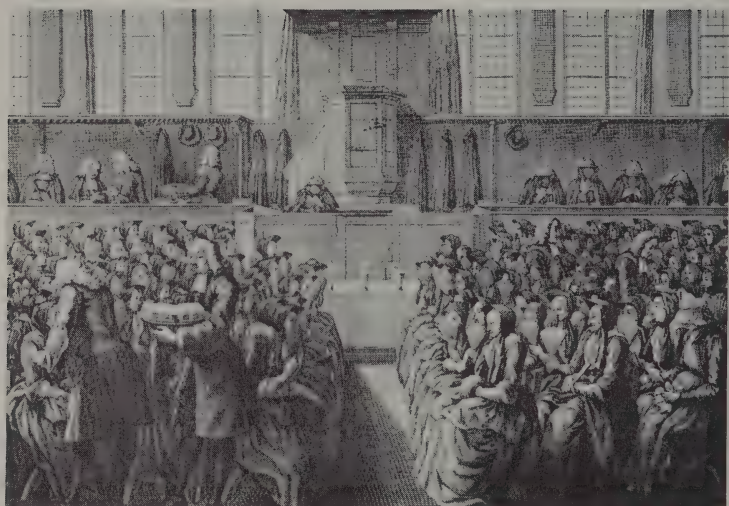
### **Ancestral Home of Swiss Americans**

As already suggested, Switzerland was the native land, either directly or indirectly, of nearly all the Men-

nonites in America east of the Mississippi river,—the Palatines in Pennsylvania, the Amish of Illinois and Ohio, as well as the Swiss who came directly to Ohio and Indiana, in the early nineteenth century. The following family names wherever found today in America in Amish and Mennonite communities are all of Swiss origin, mainly from Bern and Zurich though other cantons are also represented. In the following list no attempt is made at a consistent or correct Swiss spelling. The earlier Pennsylvania names of course appear considerably Anglicized as do also many of the Amish in Illinois. The later immigrants to Ohio and Indiana from Switzerland direct are more likely to retain their original form. Where different spellings occur, such as Guth, Gut, or Good for instance, only one form is given although all may occur sometimes even in the same family.

The list, which by no means pretends to be complete, follows—Allebach, Althaus, Amstutz, Augsburg, Ackerman, Bachman, Brubaker, Bertsche, Bowman, Bomberger, Baer, Brenneman, Bixel, Bechler, Bechtel, Baumgartner, Basinger, Burckey, Brand, Becker, Biery, Beidler, Bookwalter, Blosser, Boshart, Burghalter, Bucher, Brackbill, Badertscher, Dirstein, Detweiler, Diller, Eby, Ebersole, Eiman, Ellenberger, Egly, Engel, Eschbach, Eicher, Eschleman, Funk, Fahrney, Frick, Flickinger, Frey, Fellman, Gehman, Gerber, Gunther, Gnaegi, Guth, Graber, Geiger, Guengrich, Gunday, Geisinger, Gochnauer, Goering, Hess, Horning, Haldeman, Hiestand, Habegger, Huber, Hostetler, Hartman, Hodel, Hauri, Herr, Hauter, Hirschler, Hilty, Hirschy, Hunsinger, Imhoff, Ioder, Ingold, Kendig, Krehbiel, Kennel, Kaufman, Kreider, Kratz, Krup, Landis, Longenecker, Luginbill, Locher, Leatherman, Lehman, Littwiller, Lichty, Meili, Metzler, Maurer, Moser, Mosiman, Musselman, Newcomer, Neuenschwander, Nisley, Nussbaum, Neuhauser, Neff, Oberholtzer,

Oeberli, Oesch, Plank, Risser, Rich, Reist, Reber, Rohrer, Roetlisberger, Richenbach, Rupp, Ruth, Roth, Roeschli, Ramseir, Schlegel, Shenk, Strickler, Schope, Schrag, Schneck, Steiner, Stutzman, Sprunger, Shallenberger, Steinman, Stucki, Sommer, Stalter, Schertz, Schantz, Schlatter, Stoll, Sweitzer, Suter, Stauffer, Schmutz, Snavely, Streit, Slabach, Showalter, Smucker, Shoenauer, Troyer, Thierstein, Thut, Ummel, Verkler, Welty, Wenger, Wisler, Witmer, Wuetrich, Yordy, Zuercher, Zeist, Zook, etc.



Lord's Supper, Singel Church, Amsterdam, by B. Picart



## IV

### THE NETHERLANDS

#### AFTER MENNO SIMONS

At the time of Menno Simon's death the Anabaptists, or Mennonites, were still the largest evangelical party in many sections of The Netherlands, although it was not long until they were greatly outnumbered by the Calvinists, who have ever since played a dominant role in the religious affairs of the little Dutch kingdom. They were found chiefly in the northern coast provinces—Flanders, Zeeland, Holland, upper and lower, Friesland and Groningen; but small groups were also scattered throughout the interior regions. During the entire sixteenth century too, they were subjected to the most bitter persecution by both Charles, and his son Philip. It is doubtful whether any other people in Europe suffered from the ravages of religious intolerance and political oppression as did the inhabitants of the Lowlands under the sway of these two bigoted Catholic rulers; and unquestionably no other groups in all Europe can claim as many martyrs to the cause of religious freedom as do the Mennonites. Although relatively a small group, as compared with the larger Reformation parties, yet between 1531, the date of the execution of the first Anabaptist martyr in The Netherlands, to the close of the century, more Mennonites were put to death for the sake of their religious convictions in The Netherlands alone than were sent to a martyr's grave from all the religious parties in England during the same period, not excluding the reign of Bloody Mary herself. The various bloody

decrees issued by Charles were confirmed and renewed by a general edict proclaimed by Philip in 1556, in which he forbade all laymen to discuss or teach publicly the Holy Scriptures, on penalty of death; the men to be executed with the sword, and the women to be buried alive; but in case of persistence in their errors, the execution was to be by fire; and under any conditions the property of the accused was to be confiscated. Anabaptism especially was to be ruthlessly destroyed.

As a result of persistent persecution throughout the century many of the Mennonite refugees found their way to other more tolerant lands. In Flanders, where Catholicism finally prevailed, and where the Inquisition consequently worked most perfectly, Mennonitism was practically rooted out by 1600. Many of the refugees fled to the northern provinces where opposition to Spanish rule was more determined among the people in general. But from all the provinces there was a continual stream of Mennonite refugees to neighboring countries—England, East Friesland; and also to Poland, and East Prussia, where along the Vistula delta, a number of flourishing congregations were built in the course of time. This wholesale murder of innocent men and women, who asked for nothing more than the right to worship God as their consciences directed, did not cease until finally William of Orange conquered the Dutch provinces one after another, and in 1578 established a limited degree of religious toleration. The last of the Mennonite martyrs to suffer the death penalty in the north, so far as the records of van Braght reveal, was executed in Leeuwarden in 1574; while the last recorded victim in the south was a woman, who was buried alive in Brussels, in 1597.

As to the number of men and women who were put to death during this century for their religious faith, it

is difficult to estimate. The number, fifty thousand or more, occasionally quoted in the popular histories of the period, is no doubt greatly exaggerated. Counting, of course, all those who fell in battle during the prolonged political struggle throughout the century, in the war of independence, as well as those who died as a result of those wars, and also the political executions, the total number might well run into the thousands and perhaps tens of thousands; but the purely religious executions made up but a mere fraction of this entire number. Perhaps about half of van Braght's list of fifteen hundred Anabaptist martyrs were from the Dutch provinces. Flanders alone furnished nearly four hundred. Brandt, the Dutch historian, lists five hundred and ninety-three. Dr. W. J. Kühler, Dutch historian, is authority for the statement that about two thousand Protestants were executed for their religious beliefs in The Netherlands during the century; and of these he thinks about three-fourths were Mennonites. This is a larger Mennonite contingent than that given by van Braght; but it is not likely, of course, that the well-known martyrologist was able to gather a complete list of all those who suffered the death penalty. It is interesting to note that the ratio of women to the entire number of executions among the Mennonites was much higher than among other groups. Of the former, more than thirty percent were of the so-called weaker sex, as compared with some six percent for the latter.

### **The Blood of the Martyrs**

Our best source of information of the suffering of this period is to be found in van Braght's book of martyrs, compiled in 1660, from various court, and other records. From this book we learn that the methods of execution were as cruel as fanatical ingenuity could devise. Burn-

ing at the stake. sometimes under a slow fire, was a common practise; frequently a bag of powder tied about the neck or placed within the hat of the victim hastened his death. Women were often tied up in bags and thrown into the water to drown; occasionally they were buried alive. Men and women were stretched on the rack until their bones cracked and blood gushed forth; they had their tongues and limbs pierced with screws or pinched in vices for the purpose of forcing a recantation, or perhaps a betrayal of the hiding places of their fellows. But seldom even under the greatest pain and agony, could they be induced to implicate their co-believers. A few examples from this book of horrors will be sufficient to show the spirit of the age.

In 1539, Tjaard Reynerts, (Renicx), was mercilessly tortured on the wheel because, out of compassion, and brotherly love, he had at one time harbored Menno Simons in his house during a time of the latter's distress. In 1545, a certain Francis of Bolsward, in the same province, having been charged with despising the mass, and refusing to swear and to observe the eucharist according to the Roman fashion, was burned to ashes. At the time of the execution, the attendant having stripped the victim of his clothes, and having fastened him to the stake, was about to strangle him with a rope, when the rope broke, allowing Francis to fall to the ground. The frightened executioner then hastily tried to burn his victim with peat and wood, but under the nervous strain made such a bungling job of it that he aroused the anger of the bystanders.

Executions were especially numerous and unusually diabolical during the bloody rule of Duke Alva. In 1571, Anneken Heyndricks of Amsterdam was burned at the stake for having "forsaken the mother, the holy church,

and having adopted the cursed doctrines of the Menonists." When she attempted to speak to the bystanders at the time of her burning, the executioner filled her mouth with gunpowder, and then pitched her into the fire. This done, the bailiff was seen to laugh, as though, so says the chronicler, "he had done God an acceptable service."

Testifying before sympathizing bystanders at the funeral pyre was especially unacceptable to the authorities, who had these executions in charge, and were not permitted if it could be prevented. In 1574, some thirty men and women in Antwerp were burned around one fire, and in order to prevent them from testifying to their faith the executioners

filled the mouths of the pious witnesses of God with gags and balls, so that they were not able to proclaim to the bystanders their innocence, and the reason why they suffered thus. But the priests and the monks, having noticed that these pious men of God when they came to the place of execution, freed themselves from these gags and balls, and spoke to the people from the word of God, the monks in order to prevent this had instruments made resembling vises between which they made the prisoners stick their tongues, which, when they had screwed fast, and the tip thereof touched with a red hot iron, that they should swell up and thus not slip back. And this new and abominable invention of the monks, these tyrants to their perpetual shame used on the persons mentioned above.

The Catholic church usually tried to secure a recantation from the victims before execution, sometimes promising them their freedom, and at other times a lighter sentence in case the person doomed to death would renounce his faith. To this end priests were often sent to the cells of those in prison for the purpose of convincing them of the errors of their ways; or if that would not succeed, to terrify them into a recantation. How well they succeeded is typified in the following case where



a certain friar, Cornelis, attempts the conversion of a man by the name of Jacob de Roore, a prisoner in Bruges, condemned to death in 1569. The following dialogue is recorded by van Braght.

**FRIAR CORNELIS:** Well, I've come here to see whether I can convert you (Jacob, I believe is your name) from your false and evil belief, in which you are erring, and whether I can not bring you back to the Catholic faith of your mother, the Roman church, from which you have apostatized to this damnable Anabaptism. What do you say to this, eh?

**JACOB:** With your permission, as regards that I have an evil false belief, this I deny: but that through the grace of God I have apostatized your Babylonian mother, the Roman church to the members of the true church of Christ, this I confess; and thank God for it who said: Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not her plagues. Rev. 18:4; Is. 52:11.

**FR. CORNELIS:** Is it true, and do you call our mother, the holy Roman church, the whore of Babylon? and do you call your hellish, devilish sect of Anabaptists the members of the true church of Christ? Eh, hear this fine fellow. Who the devil has taught you this? Your accursed Menno Simons I suppose . . . . .

**JACOB:** With your permission, you talk very wickedly. It was not necessary for Menno Simons to teach us something new, that the Babylonian whore signifies your mother, the Roman Catholic church, since John teaches us enough concerning this in his Apocalypse of Revelation, in the 14th, 16th and 17th and 18th chapters.

Like all Anabaptists, Jacob was well versed in the Scriptures, answering all the friar's arguments with copious Bible quotations. The friar in turn relied entirely upon a citation of authority and tradition, and upon abuse. Of Scripture he knew very little. Ridiculing Jacob's profession, that of a poor weaver and candler, he was surprised nevertheless, at the latter's thorough

knowledge of the Bible. Referring to this characteristic of the Anabaptists, he bursts out, after Jacob informs him that God often conceals His truth from the wise, and reveals it to babes;—

FR. CORNELIS: Exactly, God has revealed it to the weavers at the loom, to the cobblers on their bench, and to the bellows menders, lantern tinkers, scissors grinders, broom makers, thatchers and all sorts of riff-raff, and poor filthy and lousy beggars. And to us ecclesiastics who have studied from our youth day and night, He has concealed it. Just see how we are tormented. You Anabaptists certainly are fine fellows to understand the holy Scriptures; for before you are baptized you can't tell A from B, but as soon as you are baptized you read and write. If the devil and his mother have not a hand in this, I do not understand anything about you people.

Then follows a long discussion on various points of doctrine during which the friar often loses his temper and resorts to invective and abuse. In accusing Jacob of performing the episcopal functions of baptizing and teaching without proper confirmation, the friar asks him what he thinks of confirmation.

JACOB: I know nothing to say of episcopal authority, or of confirmation. How then should I administer it, or what should I think of it; for confirmation is a bugbear of which I know nothing.

FR. CORNELIS: Is it possible, do you Anabaptists call the sacrament of confirmation a bugbear? Ah accursed heretic, the devil take you into hell fire to burn you forever, see.

JACOB: Do not get so angry and excited, for I call it a strange bugbear, because it is unknown to me. But tell me, what it is, and what you hold concerning it; then I can better tell you what I think of it.

FR. CORNELIS: Bah, this blockhead presumes to be a bishop of the Anabaptists, and does not yet know what the sacrament of confirmation is. If you are a bishop you ought to

confirm yourself. My lords, see here, what a fine bishop the Anabaptists have had out there in the Gruthoysbosch, who preached so many sermons there. Is it not a fine bishop, teacher and preacher? But see, with what we have been vexed and tormented.

JACOB: I am no bishop, nor do I consider myself a teacher; but I have sometimes led the brethren and sisters, converts of our church, with exhortation from the word of God or the Holy Scripture according to my small ability.

After several hours spent in a vain attempt to turn the poor weaver from his faith, the friar finally gives it up in despair with this parting message,—

FR. CORNELIS: Well, I have no desire to dispute with you any longer. I shall go my way, and let the executioner dispute with you with a burning fagot . . . and afterward the devil in hell with burning pitch, brimstone and tar, see.

JACOB: No; for Paul writes "If our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens."

FR. CORNELIS: Bah, in hell. Expect nothing else than to go through this temporal fire into the eternal; hell yawns and gaps for your soul, you accursed, damned Anabaptist that you are.

The last Mennonite to suffer the death penalty in The Netherlands, according to van Braght, was a young woman by the name of Anneken van den Hove, who was buried alive near Brussels in 1597. After two years of imprisonment, during which every temptation had been offered her to recant without result, however, the court finally decided to send her to her death, in this case to be buried alive. After digging a pit into which she was cast, her executioners

continued to throw dirt and thick sods of heath ground upon her body, up to her throat; but notwithstanding all their asking, threatening or promising to release her and

take her out of the pit if she would recant, it was all in vain and she would not hearken to it. Hence they threw much additional earth and sod upon her face and whole body, and stamped with their feet upon it that she should die the sooner. This was the end of this pious heroine of Jesus Christ.

## INTERNAL DIVISIONS

It would seem that the common hardships which the Dutch Mennonites had to endure throughout the sixteenth century would have united them into a solid and cohesive body of believers which only the most divergent differences in religious practise and faith could have separated. But such was not the case. Even in periods of the most bitter persecution they found time to argue over insignificant details of religious beliefs and human conduct, which today would seem but mere trifles—sometimes hardly more than the cut of a coat, or the ceremonial manner of washing feet.

For this there are various explanations. First of all, Mennonites took their religion seriously. They were extreme individualists. Members of the state churches could shift the responsibility for their religious decisions upon the shoulders of the priest or magistrate, or perhaps upon the theological doctor. Not so the Mennonites. They were their own priests, and must answer to God directly for all their spiritual shortcomings. Their church government was strictly congregational, each congregation being an independent ecclesiastical unit, with no organic connection with others except in an advisory capacity. There was no hierarchy with power to impose uniformity of doctrine or practise upon the whole body.

Mennonites, furthermore, stressed strongly right living as a corollary to right thinking. In the state church where everybody was practically born into membership,

whether willing or not, not much stress could be placed on right conduct as a condition of continued membership. But to the Mennonites, the church must be a "pure church, without spot or wrinkle," and could be kept pure only by a rigid denial of spiritual fellowship to such members as refused to conform to the standards of faith and practise set up by the group. This strict disciplinary use of the ban was one of the early sources of contention among the Dutch Mennonites, as we have already seen, in the days of Menno himself. Regional and linguistic differences, too, became a source of division among the brethren. It is interesting to note that most of the early factions separated more because of differences on rules of human conduct, rather than upon points of theological opinion. Mennonites freely banned members for intemperance in drinking, extravagance in dress, the least evidence of dishonesty in business dealings, and the slightest infraction of the moral code.

### **Flemish**

Space does not permit here more than a mere mention of the various divisions that took place within the Mennonite body during this time. Soon after Menno's death one of the first distinct parties to be formed was that of the Flemish. This Flemish group consisted, as already noticed, of refugees who, because of the serious religious persecution in their own province of Flanders, had sought refuge in Friesland during the middle of the sixteenth century. They differed in some respects from the Frisians among whom they settled, slightly in racial traits, in language, and religious customs and practises. Having had little contact with Menno Simons and with Dirk Philips, they were less rigid in the use of the ban than were their northern brethren; and were less subject to the arbitrary control of their church elders in their



religious life. In Friesland, the elders exercised considerable autocratic power, selecting the ministers, and holding the right to baptize within their own hands; while the Flemish were more democratic in their practise, any preacher being allowed to baptize, and ministers being elected by the entire congregation. Because of their closer contact with the French, and their occupation as weavers, the Flemish wore finer clothes than did their Frisian brethren; although it is said that the latter were more particular and scrupulous in their household arrangements. Because of these various differences, and perhaps several others, these refugees were regarded with a certain degree of suspicion by the Frisians at the time of their migration. Finding it difficult to affiliate with the native church, the Flemish formed congregations of their own.

### **Frisians**

The natives of Friesland came to be known in church literature as Frisian Mennonites. After a number of vain attempts at reconciliation during the century, the Flemish and Frisians remained separate branches in many Mennonite communities for nearly two full centuries. The former especially were determined to maintain their separate identity, freely banning the latter, re-baptizing such as wished to transfer their membership to their body; and excommunicated such as intermarried with any other branch.

### **Waterlanders**

The most influential and most tolerant of these different Mennonite parties, though perhaps at no time the most numerous, was the group popularly known as the Waterlanders, so named quite early in their history after

the region in which they became most common, the low-land coast along the Zuider Zee north of Amsterdam. These Waterlanders it will be remembered were opposed to the strict application of the rigid disciplinary rules adopted at Wismar in 1554 respecting the ban, and avoidance, in the case of husband and wife. They also disagreed with Menno's views on the incarnation.

At first this group was quite orthodox on the fundamentals of the Mennonite faith and practise. Its first confession of faith, published in 1577, which also happened to be the first Dutch Mennonite confession to be drawn up by any party, stressed all the traditional Mennonite doctrines, including the conservative practise of foot washing. The later Hans de Ries confession, however, published in 1610, omits the article on this practise, and specifically rejects the application of avoidance to conjugal relations. On non-resistance, the oath, outside marriage, the magistracy, as well as all the traditional theological doctrines regarding Christ, his person and purpose, the confession remains true to the general Mennonite views.

While the Waterlanders remained quite orthodox theologically during all this period, yet they very soon assumed a more tolerant attitude than the other groups toward the non-Mennonite world on such questions as outside marriage (*buitentrouw*), admission of members from other branches of the church without rebaptism, participation in civil government, and in their general business associations. They were among the first also to adapt their church practises to the growing demands of the times, audible prayer, educated and salaried preachers and similar necessary changes.

The contention of certain recent Dutch Mennonite historians that the Waterlanders had always been *vrijzinnig* (theologically liberal), and that their confes-

sions of faith merely represented the opinions of certain individuals and were not to be regarded as binding upon the membership perhaps needs some clarification. That they were more individualistic than most others, and less inclined to blindly follow their elected church authorities may well be granted; but the very fact that these confessions were published and rather widely circulated among them would seem to be evidence that they represented certain standards of faith and practise upon which the brotherhood at large was fairly well agreed, and which might well be regarded as tests of fitness for church membership. Otherwise there would be little need for the ban. The Waterlanders, though more tolerant than the other parties were not religious anarchists.

An outstanding leader of this group was Hans de Ries, co-author with Lubbert Gerrits of the above mentioned confession of faith, composer of a well-known hymn book of that day, and compiler of a book of martyr stories which later developed into van Braght's famous *Martyrs' Mirror*. De Ries was born of Catholic parents in Antwerp in 1553. Early in life he joined the Reformed church, but later was converted to the Waterlanders by whom he was soon elected to the ministry. Under suspicion by the authorities for his religious views, he was subjected to considerable persecution. He served a number of congregations including Amsterdam, Emden, and for forty years at Alkmaar. He took an active part in the fight against the Socinian movement in his day, and was a strong supporter of all attempts to bring about greater religious cooperation of the various Mennonite groups. He died in 1638.

### Upper Germans

Occupying somewhat of a middle position between the Waterlanders and the Frisians and Flemish were the

Upper Germans, consisting of some Dutch congregations but more of their neighboring German brethren, who were inclined to follow the advice of the Strassburg meeting of 1555 regarding the ban and avoidance, which was carried to Menno and the followers of his strict rules by Zylis and Lemke in 1556.

These were the four main Mennonite divisions in The Netherlands during the sixteenth century. But among both the Flemish and the Frisians there were divisions within divisions. Each developed left and right wings. Thus the former party sprouted an "Old Flemish" offshoot, and this offshoot was later subdivided into a "Groninger" Old Flemish and a "Danzig" Old Flemish wing. The Frisians in turn expanded into a "Hard" and a "Loose" or "Young" Frisian party. Most of these divisions were based on disciplinary rather than on theological considerations.

Originally the terms Frisian and Flemish denoted racial as well as religious differences, but in course of time as all these groups spread themselves throughout the country these biological designations lost their significance. Thus the Old Flemish were not Flemish at all racially, but mostly Frisians and north Hollanders.

All these factions spread throughout the churches of The Netherlands; and in every community there were likely to be two or more Mennonite congregations side by side, but having no religious fellowship with one another. The Flemish were found for the most part in Groningen, South Holland and East Friesland; the Frisians in the northern provinces; the Waterlanders as just indicated, also in the north. All the factions, Frisian and Flemish especially, were transplanted by Dutch immigrants to daughter colonies around the Baltic, into Poland, and East Prussia in the sixteenth century; and later by way of Russia even to the prairies of Kansas

and Manitoba. While these factional names had almost entirely disappeared in The Netherlands by the beginning of the nineteenth century they continued longer in the daughter colonies.

### Jan Jacobs-folk

With these early divisions of the sixteenth century should be mentioned also several small groups that originated in the seventeenth. One of these was known as the Jan Jacobs-folk, and had its source in the Frisian church in Harlingen. There had been a discussion for some time among the Frisian churches in general as to whether or not the ban should be strictly applied against those married outside of the church; and whether candidates for membership from the Flemish party should be admitted without re-baptism. It was just at this time, in 1599, that Jan Jacobs, an elder in the Frisian congregation, announced to his people that after consulting some of the ministers in his congregation, he had decided to insist upon the following rules among his brethren—no member would be permitted to sell any produce to a non-Mennonite husband of an excommunicated Mennonite woman if the woman herself could make use of the produce; but he might sell to the husband for his own direct use, or what could be used by neither; a Mennonite woman married to an unbelieving husband must prevent her children from being baptized into the state church; no Mennonite would be permitted to take passage or send freight on a vessel in which as much as one thirty-second part of the vessel was owned by an excommunicated former member, or in which any of the crew were such.

Jan Jacobs actually gained a small following for these stringent views, and established several congre-



gations in various parts of The Netherlands, mostly in Friesland. Jan himself, getting into trouble with the Frisian government because of his strict rules was banished from the province for a time; but wherever he went, he preached his peculiar doctrines, and gained a few followers. The last Jan Jacobs-folk congregation amalgamated with another Mennonite congregation on the island of Ameland in 1855.

### Uko Wallists

The Uko Wallists were the successors of the Jan Lucas folk, the followers of one Jan Luyes or Lucas, a conservative elder in the Flemish congregation in Groningen, who by keeping his followers out of a union of the Flemish with the local Frisian group in 1628, developed a small sect known afterward by his own name. This small group was later absorbed by the followers of Uko Wallis, a disciple of Jan Luyes. Uko formulated some additional peculiar views of his own for which he was exiled from Groningen in 1637. Among other strange notions of his was the peculiar outlawed belief that Judas Iscariot committed no sin in betraying his Master, and that he still had a good chance of eternal salvation in spite of his act. Uko was an immersionist, and believed in the strict interpretation of Menno's theory of the incarnation, and strict application of the ban, especially against those guilty of *buitentrouw*. He also advocated the practise of foot washing which was beginning to be discarded by the more liberal congregations. Scattered bands of Uko Wallists were to be found in Groningen, Friesland and in Danzig for many years.

While these various factions, together with numerous others not mentioned here, continued their separate exist-

ence more or less until well toward the close of the eighteenth century, yet in the main, by that time the Mennonites in general might well be grouped together under two heads—the conservatives and liberals, or Fine and Coarse as they were sometimes called. The more conservative included all those who held tenaciously to the old traditions—the rigorous use of the ban, marital avoidance, opposition to *buitentrouw*, Menno's view of the incarnation, rebaptism of candidates for membership coming from other groups, law preaching, foot washing, silent prayer, preaching from manuscript, simple clothes, non-conformity to the world in general, and all the other ancient practises without the slightest alteration. Because they had departed so slightly from the ways of Menno these regarded themselves the real Mennonites, while the more liberal elements were inclined to call themselves by the more general term *Doopsgezinde*.

It may be well to remember of course that the Mennonites of Holland were not alone in their strict regulation of the every day affairs of life, and in their disapproval of extravagant dress and luxurious living. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries practically all of the dissenting religious bodies—Puritans, Quakers, Separatists, Baptists and later on the Methodists, as well as the Mennonites—spent much of their spiritual energy in trying to force their more worldly-minded brethren to conform to the prescribed modes of conduct and dress regulations. The first dissension in the Leyden community of Separatists, it will be remembered, was caused by the lace on Mrs. Frances Johnson's bonnet, which furnished a subject of controversy for a number of years. Bradford, the historian and governor of Plymouth colony, said that the church members were so strict that some of them were offended at the whale bone in the dress or sleeve, or the starch in a collar.

## The Byntges Controversy

This strict insistence upon maintaining rigid standards of moral integrity and honest business practises sometimes led the Mennonites into serious controversies over non-essential details as the following instance will show. In 1588, an elder by the name of Thomas Byntges in the Flemish church at Franeker purchased a house from a neighbor for a given sum, but permitted the seller to write into the deed, for purposes of his own, a sum higher than the purchase price, the purchaser himself receiving no benefit from the transaction. This matter was finally brought to the notice of the other ministers of the church, who were inclined to regard the affair as of rather doubtful honesty. Byntges denied any attempt at willful wrongdoing, stating that the difference between the two prices was covered by other valuable considerations. But the dispute could not be settled so easily. As appeals were sent to outside elders to help settle the local differences, the quarrel spread beyond the confines of the local congregation, gathering new issues no doubt as it grew, until what began as a local disagreement, ended in a division that extended throughout the entire Dutch Flemish church. The Byntges party came to be known sometimes as the party of the *Housebuyers*, while their opponents in return were designated as *Contra-housebuyers*. The "Housebuyers," because they also happened to be the more conservative of the two groups, also came to be known a little later as the "Old Flemish"; the others, after the housebuying episode had been forgotten, merely as the "Flemish." Strict business honesty is unquestionably a virtue to be highly commended, but it is doubtful whether the vindication of the principle of super-honesty shown here was worth the price paid.

It may be well to remind the reader at this point

that the unduly large amount of space devoted here to these numerous small and insignificant divisions as compared with the main groups is not meant to be indicative of their numerical strength or their religious significance, but rather an illustration of the length to which Mennonite individualism may go when directed by unbalanced leadership.

### **The Reformed Church as Oppressor**

It must not be forgotten that the toleration granted by William of Orange at the time of his conquest of the northern provinces, was limited in scope. Religious toleration was still a relative term. State churches, whether Protestant or Catholic, still claimed exclusive possession of the souls of men. Complete soul liberty was not yet dreamed of by any one in authority. For another two centuries, almost, Mennonites were still compelled to pay taxes for the support of a state church which they did not attend; to have their marriages confirmed by that church; to build their meeting houses on an inconspicuous back alley, without tower or bell; and to suffer humiliating restrictions of various sorts in the free exercise of their religious practises and civil privileges.

As already noted, Mennonitism was completely choked out of Flanders at an early date. But in the northern provinces, which eventually won their independence from Spanish tyranny, the Reformed church fell heir to all the property, as well as the ecclesiastical privileges of the former Catholic establishment. The new church was no less inclined to play the role of oppressor of non-conformists than its predecessor. In every province of the new state repeated attempts were made by the ecclesiastical authorities for some time to

completely suppress the Mennonite faith, though no longer to be sure by fire and sword. Persuasion and coercion were both tried.

Upon the insistence of the Reformed clergy, a public debate was held, in 1578, at Emden between the Reformed leaders and the Mennonites, representing the brotherhood in eastern Netherlands and East Friesland, largely in the hope, no doubt, on the part of the Reformed that by exposing the views of the Mennonites on such controversial questions as the oath, incarnation, use of the ban, baptism, freedom of the will, the magistracy, and war resistance public opinion might be sufficiently aroused against them to justify governmental intervention. In 1596, a similar public discussion was held at Leeuwarden for a similar purpose. This latter debate lasted several months, and ran through one hundred and fifty sessions. Peter von Koeln was one of the Mennonite speakers in both of the above debates. Neither side was convinced of its errors in either of these discussions; but the Reformed clergy, having the sympathy of the ruling authorities, were declared the victors, and did succeed in obtaining a government order temporarily forbidding Mennonite worship in Friesland, and a money fine for several Mennonite preachers for refusing to comply with the order; as well as the banishment, some time later, of one of the conservative leaders, Jan Jacobs, of Harlingen, already mentioned. For a time, too, Mennonites were denied the right to conduct business enterprises in Leeuwarden. In Groningen preaching was prohibited, and it was decreed by the authorities that unbaptized children could not inherit property. In the city of Sneek the right of worship was denied as late as 1628. In one of their synods the Reformed clergy asked permission from the government to attend Mennonite meetings for the purpose of turning their misguided brethren from



the errors of their ways, a request that was granted, to the great annoyance of those thus visited.

In 1604, at another synod, requests were made to prevent the ordination of young preachers; later efforts would deny ministers the right of travelling from one congregation to another, and to baptize and preach. As late as 1664, at another synod, it was suggested that the erection of new meeting houses be forbidden. And so, throughout the entire century and beyond, synod after synod passed drastic recommendations in an attempt to completely suppress the Mennonite faith. Although they were occasionally able to influence governmental action, yet generally the Mennonites had such a good reputation for industry and integrity that the governments, both provincial and national, paid slight heed to these unreasonable demands of the state church.

### States General Favorable to Mennonites

With the States General especially, and the heads of the national government, the Mennonites had a good reputation, partly, among other reasons because of their liberal contributions in times of stress and especially in times of war, to local and national governments; for, although they claimed to be non-resistant, and opposed to war service in any form, yet they seemingly did not see the inconsistency between refusal to carry arms themselves and furnishing money for others to do so. In all the wars of the period Mennonites made substantial money contributions to the war chests. So thoroughly had the Dutch Mennonites won the confidence of King William, of England, when he was still the Dutch *Stadhouder*, that when in 1694, in the Barony of Rheydt, on the Dutch border, a group of Mennonites had been driven out of their homes by the local baron, the English king wrote the count of the Palatinate, in whose jurisdiction

the barony was located, interceding in behalf of the exiles. Again during the period of Swiss persecution in the early part of the eighteenth century, not only the States General, but also the burgomaster of Amsterdam, with both of whom the Dutch Mennonites had great influence, interceded with the Bernese authorities in behalf of the persecuted Mennonites, in which they spoke of the Dutch Mennonites in terms of the highest praise.

### THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ONE OF CONSTRUCTIVE GROWTH

The separatist tendencies mentioned above during the sixteenth century were followed in the early part of the next by numerous attempts not only to combine individual congregations of like faith and practise into more effective working organizations, but also to bring together such of the factions as had most in common. As early as 1566 the native churches of four towns in Friesland—Harlingen, Franeker, Leeuwarden and Dokkum—organized a league against foreign Mennonite influence, thereby starting the division into the Frisian and Flemish branches already described.

Among a number of other early unification movements among various groups might be mentioned that of a number of congregations in western Friesland which in 1639, united on a basis of a series of practical rules of living that are worthy of a brief mention here. In case of a second marriage, it is suggested in these rules, that the inherited property interests of the children of the first marriage be carefully defined, so as to avoid later disagreements; young people are advised to maintain high standards in their social relations, and to seek the advice of parents before entering the married state; elaborate and expensive weddings are to be discouraged, after the example of Tobit, of Apocrypha fame; mer-

chants, in their business dealings, are to avoid the usual visits to the taverns, thus escaping the danger of the intemperate use of strong drink; the use of tobacco, also, which is described as an unclean and expensive habit, is forbidden; as is part ownership of a merchant vessel which carries guns for protection; plainness of dress and the strictest simplicity in the decoration of both ships and houses is prescribed. These regulations were read annually for nearly one hundred years before the congregations comprising this particular group.

In 1647, forty Waterlander congregations met to discuss their common problems; and thirty-two Flemish and Upper German churches did the same in 1649. Throughout the next hundred years and more, the unionization and amalgamation process continued. By 1800 there was little left of the old factionalism, in spite of several new divisions, except the terminology, and a few independent, isolated congregations that had somehow not kept pace with the spirit of the times. The organization, in 1811, of the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit* completed the unification movement which by that time had already made substantial headway.

### Early Confessions of Faith

It was these first attempts to find a common basis of union that called forth the first confessions of faith, nearly all of which fall well within the first quarter of the seventeenth century. One of the earliest, the Concept of Cologne, drawn up in 1591, represented the Frisians, Flemish and Upper Germans along the lower Rhine; the Hans de Ries confession, written as early as 1610, became the recognized statement of faith of the Waterlanders, and was presented to the small band of the English Gainsboro exiles under John Smythe in Amsterdam as representing the Mennonite doctrines. The Olive Branch,

drawn up in 1627, as its name suggests, was definitely devoted to the cause of union, that of the Flemish and Frisians. One of the best known, and later one of the most widely adopted of all the confessions, was that of Dordrecht of 1632, originally drafted by representatives of the Flemish branch of the church, but later adopted by other groups, including the Upper Germans, and Alsatian Mennonites; and today still the best known statement of faith among the more conservative branches of the church in America, though long ago cast aside with all other confessions by the Mennonites in the land of its origin. This statement of Mennonite doctrine reflects the views of the conservatives on such questions as foot washing, shunning, and outside marriage; though on the doctrine of the incarnation it does not accept Menno's unusual theory, being satisfied with the declaration "which the faithful evangelists have given and left their description thereof."

It has already been intimated that the Dutch Mennonites differed less among themselves in their religious doctrines than in the application of those doctrines. It seemed easier for them to think together than to live together. Their theology was never philosophical, but decidedly biblical. Leaders of Mennonite thought never concerned themselves much with the fine spun theories and philosophical distinctions which puzzled the heads of the theologians of the day; but they expressed themselves in speech and writing on all questions of church doctrine in terms of biblical phraseology, and let it go at that; it was not only much easier, but safer. Their statements, well buttressed with scriptural references were inclined toward a literal interpretation of the Bible.

### **Socinian Influences**

Among the charges made by the Reformed clergy

against the Mennonites during this period, the first half of the seventeenth century, was the close affiliation between the more liberal-minded groups of the latter with certain unorthodox religious movements that swept through The Netherlands at this time—Socinianism and Arminianism.

Socinianism was an anti-Calvinist, anti-pedobaptist, anti-trinitarian religious philosophy that had its origin in Poland during the latter part of the sixteenth century, and had found its way into The Netherlands during the first half of the seventeenth. It was composed of a rather strange admixture of liberal theological speculations and orthodox religious views. The heart of Socinianism was its rejection of the doctrine of the trinity, though rather strangely, it retained a belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures, miracles,\*and many other orthodox doctrines. Jesus, according to this view, was a mere human being, though miraculously born, leading a perfect and holy life on earth, and risen from the dead. He did not atone for the sins of men, though through his teaching, and his perfect example, and by showing men a better way, he became after a fashion the Savior of men, worthy of the highest adoration and worship. The sacraments were mere ceremonies, valuable in their influence but not necessary to salvation. Socinians were advocates of religious toleration, and, like the Mennonites, were opposed to the oath and war; and claimed to work for the restoration of the beliefs and practises of primitive Christianity.

Because of some of these latter views the Socinians had much in common with the Mennonites, and certain groups of the latter were greatly influenced by their contacts with the former. While Hans de Ries, it will be remembered, led a campaign against the movement, some of the Flemish, on the other hand, were in close ac-



cord with it. For a full century Mennonites were accused frequently by the established church authorities of Socinian leanings; and this suspicion was a leading cause of persecution. A conspicuous example of this is that of Johan Stinstra, to be described later in this chapter.

### Arminianism

Arminianism, of native origin, later usually spoken of as the movement of the *Remonstrants*, was a protest against the extreme hyper-Calvinism of the Dutch state church. Like the Puritans in England, and the Huguenots of France, the Dutch Remonstrants became involved in the political struggles of the country, allying themselves with the Republican party. Thus they were bitterly opposed by both the established church and the monarchical party so long as that party was in power. For a time they were forbidden to practise their religion, and their leaders were exiled. But with the death of Maurice of Nassau, in 1625, they were again granted toleration.

There was much in the religious philosophy of the Remonstrants that appealed to the Mennonites, especially their common belief in the freedom of the will, and opposition to the idea of predestination. For a time the attraction seemed mutual. In the beginning, before the Remonstrants had clearly formulated their religious views, some of them were inclined to accept the Hans de Ries confession as a satisfactory statement of their religious faith. The Mennonites, in turn, frequently worshipped with the Remonstrants; prospective ministers occasionally attended the Remonstrant seminary at Amsterdam; and the two sometimes exchanged ministers. During the early part of the following century one wing of the Mennonite church was called the Remonstrant Mennonites.

And so it was to be expected that the Mennonites

would share with both the Socinians and the Remonstrants much of the opposition and persecution at times directed by both the state and the established church against these proscribed religious faiths.

## Collegiants

There was another contemporary religious movement in The Netherlands, that of the *Collegiants*, which exerted considerable influence upon the spiritual life of certain of the Dutch Mennonites. This movement, which drew rather heavily upon both Socinian and Remonstrant sources for its religious practises, was not an attempt to form a new religious party, but had as its aim rather the spiritualizing of those already existing; and represented in a way a protest against the dogmatism of both the Calvinists and the Remonstrants. There were no doctrinal tests for membership in the group. Anyone spiritually minded and baptized as an adult was welcomed to their meetings where he might prophesy and exercise his spiritual gifts to his heart's content. These meetings, called *Collegia*, gave the movement its name. Because the town of Rhynsburg, near Leyden, finally became the chief headquarters of the Collegiants they were sometimes called *Rhynsburgers*.

These Rhynsburgers were quite liberal in their religious thinking; they accepted no creeds; and, like the Quakers after them, minimized the value of religious sacraments and ceremonies with the exception of baptism, which was by immersion. Like the Quakers, too, they denied the necessity of an ordained ministry. Their informal meetings for worship frequently held during the week, and open to members of any church party, were often attended by the Mennonites. *Collegia* were

formed in many Mennonite congregations. Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan, prominent Mennonite minister at Amsterdam, as will be seen a little later, became a leader of a Collegiant group in his own city.

There can be little doubt but that all these disturbing religious movements above mentioned with which the Mennonites were more or less closely affiliated had considerable influence upon the religious thinking of the denomination in the years that followed.

### **The War Among the Lambs (*Lammerenkrijgh*)**

Not only did this affiliation with the Collegiants bring added oppression to certain Mennonite groups by both the state church and government, but it was also partly responsible for another far-reaching division among the Mennonites themselves. The trouble began in the Flemish congregation in Amsterdam. This congregation was unfortunate in having on its bench of preachers, two practising physicians, both chosen by lot, and still serving without pay—Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan, and Samuel Apostool. Of these two, de Haan was the more progressive and liberal minded. He came from a long line of religious leaders. His father had been a barber and surgeon, a usual combination in those days, as well as a preacher, which was not usual except among Mennonites; and his great-grandfather was the martyr, Gillis van Aachen, mentioned elsewhere. Being a student of medicine, as well as of theology, he could not help being influenced by the scientific discoveries and the radical philosophical theories that were revolutionizing the thought of his day—the contributions of such men as Harvey, Descartes and Kepler, some of whom lived in his own city of Amsterdam.

After de Haan had been elected to the ministry by his congregation, in 1646, he attended the Collegiant meetings in his city, and was in sympathy with their new views and practises. He was a great friend of youth, and in his later years, seeing the need among his people of a trained ministry, he gathered together a number of likely young candidates for theological instruction, thus laying the foundation for the later Mennonite Seminary. Like the Collegiants, he placed little stress on set confessions and prescribed creeds, teaching rather that the Scriptures alone should furnish the basis of one's religious faith.

Not all the members of de Haan's congregation agreed with these tolerant views. In the year 1664, about seven hundred, under the leadership of the other doctor-preacher, Apostool, still demanding a set confession of faith, withdrew from the mother church, and set up an establishment of their own which met in a building with the sign of the Sun, for which reason they came to be known as the *Zonists*, while the original church, worshipping near a house with the sign of a lamb, were distinguished as the *Lamists*. This new movement soon spread beyond the borders of the local congregation into many churches throughout The Netherlands, swallowing up many of the earlier small factions, and dividing the whole brotherhood once more into a liberal and conservative wing. Both *Zonist* and *Lamist* societies were formed throughout the land. The conservative *Zonists* rigidly defended the orthodox views of the trinity, with a decided trend toward Calvinism, and the traditional religious practises forbidding their members to fellowship in any way with the Collegiants; to share the communion table with them, or to follow their Quaker practise of permitting laymen to preach or prophesy. It was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the division was finally healed over.

## English Quakers Visit Holland

It was about this time, too, the middle of the seventeenth century, that the English Quakers, who had just started in England, tried to get a foothold among the Dutch Mennonites, from whom perhaps they may, in an earlier period, have imbibed some of their distinctive doctrines and practises, and with whom at least they still had much in common. All the pioneer founders, and missionaries, including Fox and Penn themselves, made repeated visits to the Mennonite congregations along the lower Rhine on proselyting tours, usually with but slight success, however. As early as 1657, according to a Quaker historian

Ames, Stubbs, and Caton came over to Holland, they moved some of their own countrymen with their Doctrines to such a degree that they raised some disturbance in the Reformed church, and brought a few of the Country Mennonites to their side, and these made the name of Quakers first known in these Provinces.

A little later, the same writer, speaking of the work of Caton continues

He goes back to Amsterdam in which city there is a small church gathered and that principally of the Dutch Anabaptists.

The Yearly Meeting of London in 1694 reports that at Twist and Hoorn

there is great openness among the Mennonites to hear the Friends tell the Truth.

That not all the Mennonites, however, were always eager to hear the "Truth" is evident from an episode which took place in the course of the proselyting tour of an English Quaker to the Amsterdam Mennonites, who in his visit observed



many things that he disliked among both the churches of which the whole city consisted (Reformed and Mennonite) and he wrote a letter to each. 'Twas a tart letter full of contumelious Accusations and Reproofs as if the religion of both of them was only a barren profession, and their lives the height of all manner of Hipocracie and Impiete, a denial of God, concluding with a denunciation of threats and execrations against them as if it were in the name and by the command of the Divine Being himself. The letters were sent to Harling by Cornelis Rudolf, and James Byland, the father and son, all of them citizens of Amsterdam, and former Mennonites, but now turned Quakers. So to Harling they all go.

These letters were to be tried first on the Mennonites evidently, and then if successful, upon the Reformed; but the well-laid plans of the zealous missionary miscarried, as well-laid plans sometimes do. Before he reached the Reformed, the message bearer had been cast into jail by the magistrate of the city, where he remained for some time. The "tart" letter with its "contumelious Accusations" was too tart, seemingly, for even the long-suffering Mennonites of Harlingen; for "almost all of them resented it as a heinous thing and set upon him (Rudolf) with great clamor and violence."

Among the staunch defenders of the Mennonite cause against the onslaught of the Quakers during this period was Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan, the Amsterdam preacher mentioned above. Croese, the Quaker historian, leaves us an interesting account of a debate held in Amsterdam, in 1677, between de Haan on the one hand and both George Fox and William Penn on the other,—

William Penn and Galen Abraham, a physician and preacher among those Mennonites which we account of all, or the most part of them at least to be Socinians, at the same time almost at Amsterdam, disputed at a private house of the signs of the new church, and extraordinary call of the ministers. And after such a manner as Penn who after the

manner of the nation, spake nothing but in a premeditated and set form of speech, showed upon this occasion that when he had a mind to it, he was not wanting in the faculty of answering extempore to the sudden and large Discourse of others; but the other (Galenus) so abounded in multitudes of words as he never came to the stress of the matter where the cause lay; and where he could not tell how to bring close arguments to the purpose, he either very ingeniously put off answering at all, or turned it into a Joke and Banter, and so it ended after the same rate as most Disputations commonly do.

Sewell, another Quaker historian, reporting the same event adds a few more details in his account that are worth recording here,

Galenus answered that nobody now-a-days could be accepted as a messenger of God unless he confirmed his doctrine by miracles. Penn denied this and said miracles are not necessary. Fox then spoke something to the matter; but being short breathed and went several times away which some were ready to impute to a passionate temper but I well know that therein they do him wrong. This dispute was a troublesome business, for the parties on both sides were fain to speak by an interpreter which generally was performed so imperfectly that at last the conference broke off without coming to a decision, although many weighty arguments were objected against the position.

### **Dutch Anabaptists and Mennonites in England**

In the meantime many Dutch Anabaptists and Mennonites had found their way across the Channel to England all through the latter part of the sixteenth century, and their story may as well be told here as elsewhere. In fact, long before the Reformation there had been more or less of commercial intercourse between the wool-growers and manufacturers of the island kingdom and the skilled artisans and textile workers of the Lowland towns. But during the sixteenth century, and especially under the reign of the last two bigoted Spanish rulers

there was a steady stream of Dutch immigrants of a new type arriving on the east coast of England—political and religious refugees. Among the latter were hundreds, and perhaps thousands of Anabaptists.

Not that Anabaptists, of course, were more welcome to Henry the Eighth and Elizabeth than to Philip; but mingling with throngs of political refugees against whom there was no suspicion, speaking a foreign tongue, and practising a strange religion, and leading a quiet, unobtrusive life, these Dutch Anabaptists were able to hide their identity, and escape the persecution that would have been theirs had they been natives of the same faith.

That the English ruling authorities, however, both state and church, were as little inclined to endure the tolerant views of the Anabaptists, as were those of other countries, once they were recognized, is clearly evident. As early as 1534 Henry the Eighth issued a royal proclamation against them, ordering them out of the kingdom on pain of death. This decree was repeated by every English ruler during the sixteenth century. That the church, too, feared Anabaptism, is shown by the fact that every confession of faith of the various churches, Anglican and Presbyterian, found it worthwhile among other articles of their belief, to specifically repudiate all the dominant Anabaptist, or Mennonite doctrines.

To be sure, in the early part of the century, it was undoubtedly the Münster brand of the movement that the English feared; and then too, it must be remembered that the term Anabaptist at that time, like Bolshevist of today, was used to signify all kinds of radical beliefs and movements. But the specific mention in the confessions of the last half of the century of such distinctive subjects as the magistracy, oath, war, and even Menno's strange views on the incarnation is evidence that many of the Anabaptists who came to England during that period

were of the Mennonite type—in other words were Mennonites.

With all their attempts to live a secluded life, however, native Anabaptists, as well as the Dutch Mennonite refugees, were occasionally sent to the block. One example of the latter was that of a group of some thirty Dutch exiles whom a contemporary writer spoke of as "Menno's" people, and who were arrested on Easter day of 1575 while holding a religious service in a private home in one of the suburbs of London. Suspecting their identity, the Bishop of London, before whom they were tried, asked them four test questions as to their beliefs regarding the oath, the magistracy, baptism, and the incarnation. Satisfied that they were Mennonites, the bishop sent them back to prison. The prisoners had many friends among the people. Foxe, the English martyrologist, sent a petition to Queen Elizabeth in their behalf, as did the Dutch Reformed church in London. But all to no avail. Five of the number recanted, who after doing public penance in the courtyard of St. Paul's, were set free; a number of them escaped; and a few were released. But two of them, Jan Pieters, "a poor man upward of fifty years old, with nine children," and Hendrick ter Woort, "a handsome and respectable man about twenty-six years old, a goldsmith by trade, who had been married about eight weeks before he was apprehended," paid the extreme penalty for their beliefs, being burned at the stake, at Smithfield, according to the Mennonite martyrologist, van Braght, "without even being dispatched first by strangling or with powder according to the custom of the country."

While Anabaptism as a whole made little headway during this period among the native Englishmen, yet it cannot be denied that the various separatist movements, which seemingly adopted half of the Anabaptist

program, and which arose during the latter part of the century in the very centers along the eastern coast where Dutch artisans and political and religious refugees were most numerous, owed much of their distinctive principles to the Dutch Anabaptist leaven.

One of the earliest of the leaders for an independent church was Robert Browne of Norwich, who was forced by religious persecution, in 1580, to take his congregation to Holland. Here at Middleburg, he established his church for a time based on congregational principles. A part of his group, it is said, later joined the Mennonites, but Browne himself returned to England, where after a period of disappointment, he gave up the struggle, and lapsed back into the Anglican fold.

Not long after, another separatist congregation was formed in London under the leadership of Francis Johnson and Henry Ainsworth. These too, were forced into exile, finally gathering together their congregation again in Amsterdam.

The most important of these independent groups, however, was the one at Gainsboro, and the neighboring village of Scrooby under the pastorate of one, John Smythe. This congregation is of interest chiefly because in its membership it included a number of men who later played an important role in both English and American political and religious history—John Robinson, William Brewster and William Bradford of the Pilgrim fathers; and Thomas Helwys and John Murton, founders of the English Baptist church. In 1606, Smythe and his Gainsboro followers found it expedient to leave for Amsterdam; John Robinson, who in the meantime had become pastor of the Scrooby contingent of the original congregation, followed with his party to the same city the following year. Smythe, refusing to join the Johnson group which had already been established in Amsterdam,



set up his own independent congregation. Robinson also decided to retain his separate organization, but soon left Amsterdam for Leyden.

Although all these English groups in Holland must have come into close contact with the Dutch Mennonites, with whom they had much more in common in their religious doctrines and civic principles than with the Dutch state church, yet only few of the laymen, and but one of the leaders accepted in full the Mennonite position on complete religious toleration and a democratic and voluntary church.

In fact it is a question whether even the Pilgrim fathers fully realized all the implications of religious toleration; whether their separatism, like that of the Puritans after them, was not rather of a one sided-character—toleration for themselves without the corresponding willingness to grant the same privileges to all others. In the light of their early American experiences, when they had it within their full power to put their theories into practise, it is questionable whether they advocated, as did the Anabaptists, complete separation of church and state—full soul liberty. . Seemingly none of them were willing to follow separatism to its logical conclusion. Repeatedly, Robinson as well as Johnson and other leaders found it expedient to deny the charge that they were Anabaptists.

John Smythe, however, and a goodly portion of his company had the courage to follow the path of religious liberty all the way to its source—Anabaptism—a voluntary, democratic church, composed of new-born men and women, entirely free from the state, granting to all complete freedom of conscience in matters of religion. Smythe came to this conclusion within two years after his arrival at Amsterdam. Convinced by this time that

the New Testament church must not only be independent, but it must also be voluntary, composed of a regenerate, and necessarily adult membership, he naturally concluded that baptism, the symbol of initiation into the church, if it meant anything at all in the new order of things, must be administered upon confession of faith only. To think, was to act. His old baptism consequently, administered in infancy, was not valid. But where could he find the baptism he desired.

Evidently the language barrier and other forbidding circumstances prevented the Gainsboro exiles at this time from cultivating that spirit of fellowship with any of the neighboring Mennonite churches which naturally would have suggested affiliation with that body of believers. Not finding just then what he regarded as a true New Testament church anywhere, Smythe baptized himself, then Helwys and Murton, and some forty of his followers.

A year later, the Baptist's tender conscience again troubled him. In the meantime his small congregation had been worshipping in a large bake house owned by a Waterlander Mennonite by the name of Jan Munter. Through Munter, Smythe came into closer contact with the Mennonite church, of which Lubbert Gerrits was pastor. Satisfied now that the Mennonites were a true apostolic church, and troubled somewhat, no doubt, by his hasty act of self-baptism, the former now, with thirty-one of his members, applied to the Mennonites for admission into their body. Helwys, Murton and a few others, however, refused to follow their leader in this step, not because they denied that the Mennonites were a true church, but rather because their pride forbade the repudiation of their earlier act of rebaptism. They in turn wrote the Mennonites requesting that Smythe's application be refused.

The Mennonites, due to internal disagreement, at first delayed action. Soon after this, Smythe died. Finally some of his followers were accepted into membership with the Mennonite congregation. In the meantime, in 1611, Helwys and his group had returned to their former home where they organized the first Baptist church in England. For a number of years Helwys and his followers kept up a friendly correspondence with the Amsterdam Mennonites, finally applying for union with them, ready even to waive the differences that had thus far kept them apart, divergent views regarding the oath, magistracy, and war resistance. But the Amsterdam Mennonites, still true to form, delayed, and flirted with the idea of union too long. With the introduction of immersion among the English Baptists in 1640, and as the native movement became more securely rooted in its own soil, all hope of a union between the two vanished. From now on the two branches of the Anabaptist movement—the continental Mennonites, and the English Baptists each went its own separate way.

As to the direct influence of the Dutch Mennonites upon the various English separatist movements, it will thus be seen, there may be some difference of opinion. In the case of the Baptists, as just noted, the connection is direct and clear. All Baptist historians acknowledge not only a spiritual kinship with the early continental Anabaptists, but also a direct connection with the Dutch Mennonites. All claim Menno Simons as one of the heroes of their church.

In the case of Congregationalism the relationship is not so direct. It would seem, however, that in view of the fact that the cardinal principle of Congregationalism—an independent church, was an Anabaptist doctrine well known for nearly a century in the regions where the former had its origin, one can hardly escape the convic-

tion of some connection. Many Congregational historians acknowledge a heavy debt to the Dutch Anabaptists and Mennonites, both in Holland and England, for substantial contributions to English Congregationalism.

Quakerism too, must have drawn upon Mennonite sources for many of its essential doctrines and practises. It, too, first saw the light of day in those regions of south-eastern England where the other separatist movements began; and incorporated within its body of beliefs almost in toto the tenets of the continental Mennonites including the whole program of non-resistance, with all its implications.

### **A Dream of Utopia**

It may not be out of place here to briefly mention the first attempt to plant a Dutch Mennonite colony on this side of the Atlantic. Pieter Cornelis Plockhoy of Zierkzee, a member seemingly of one of the Mennonite Collegiant groups, a dreamer of social utopias, appeared in London in 1659, petitioning parliament to establish somewhere in England or Ireland an experimental co-operative commonwealth in which there was to be religious toleration, the abolition of all poverty, and perfect equality of all classes, economic, social, and political.

Failing to accomplish his object in London, the Dutch reformer returned to Holland, where he actually succeeded in interesting the city of Amsterdam, which had already made several unsuccessful attempts to establish a colony on its recently purchased lands in New Netherlands along the Delaware, in his scheme. According to the agreement made with the city authorities, Amsterdam was to furnish the money for locating a colony of twenty-five Mennonite families in the new world.

Plockhoy provided an elaborate set of rules, regulat-

ing in minutest details the whole political and economic life of the colony. Like the proposed experiment in England, this colony was to be placed on a co-operative basis. All were to be equal in their rights and privileges. There was to be no slavery; free schools were to be set up for all. There was to be religious toleration; but seemingly, to insure the new venture against any disturbing religious influences from the outside, "Catholics, Jews, Stiff-necked Quakers, and foolhardy believers in the Millenium" were barred from joining the settlement. In keeping, too, with the general Collegiant practise of granting laymen as well as the ordained preachers the right to conduct religious worship, therefore regarding ordained clergymen unnecessary, perhaps, in a new struggling colony, there was to be no provision for gentlemen of the cloth.

The known facts about this interesting social and religious Mennonite experiment are few. We do know that Plockhoy actually succeeded, in 1662, in planting his colony on the Horekill, in the present state of Delaware; and that only two years later, the English conquest of the Dutch settlements in New Amsterdam, "plundered what belonged to the Quaking Society of Plockhoy to a naile"; and that, in 1694, Plockhoy, now grown old and blind, together with his wife, coming from somewhere, wandered into the village of Germantown one day where he found a home for his few remaining years among his fellow Mennonites, who in the meantime had been more successful than he in establishing a Mennonite colony farther up on the Delaware.

### **The Peak of Mennonite Achievement**

From what has already been said, it is quite evident that the seventeenth century, and especially the latter



part, marked the peak of Mennonite growth both as to numbers and as to spiritual and cultural self-consciousness. Much of the enduring literature of the denomination was written and published during this period. As already suggested, nearly all the confessions of faith originated within the first half of the century. The first attempt to collect and publish the complete works of Menno Simons was made in 1646; and the last Dutch edition appeared in 1681.

The most important Mennonite production of the time was the famous *Martyrs' Mirror*, compiled in 1660 by Tielman Jansz van Braght, a Mennonite preacher at Dordrecht. This monumental collection of martyr stories of the Anabaptists and others of the defenseless faith, was not entirely an original work, but a revision and an enlargement of several former collections published earlier in the century. The last Dutch edition to appear was printed in 1685, after which the interest in martyr stories began to decline. The book has been printed once in Germany since, and several times in America in both the German and English languages, and once in England, but never again in Holland.

Not to be omitted here is mention of the well-known *Biestkens Bible*, published especially for the Mennonites by Nikolaas Biestkens, a Mennonite publisher at Emden, for the first time in the preceding century, but running through more than fifty reprintings before the close of the seventeenth. This edition was based on the Lutheran translation, with such minor changes as suited more nearly the Mennonite views on controversial passages. It was the first Dutch Bible to introduce paragraph divisions in the text. It was in general use among the Mennonites until well toward the close of the eighteenth century: and among the Old Flemish at Balk, as late as 1837.

Among other Mennonite authors of this period must be included Tobias Govertsz van den Wyngaert, who was born in Amsterdam in 1587, and served his church as minister for fifty years. He was the author of numerous theological treatises well known in his day, and represented his congregation at the Dordrecht convention in 1632, which drew up the Dordrecht confession of faith.

Jan Philip Schabalje, for a time minister at Alkmaar, but later in life a book seller in Amsterdam, also wrote a number of books, including a *Life of Jesus*, published at Alkmaar in 1647, and reissued several times afterward. His best known work, however, among later Mennonite readers was a brief history of the biblical world included in *Lusthof des Gemoeds*, recited somewhat after the fashion of the famous legend of the Wandering Jew, by a disembodied spirit, who, returning from his ethereal abode at stated intervals, received his information of what was going on in this world from the lips of Adam, Noah, and one called Simon Cleophas. The book first appeared in 1635, was reissued several times soon after, and by 1744, according to one historian had already gone through fifty editions. It finally appeared in a German edition under the title *Die Wandelnde Seele*. It has also appeared a number of times in America, a recent edition published in Philadelphia claiming to be the sixteenth. The book has also been turned into English several times. It seems to have a peculiar fascination for the Pennsylvania Germans, and is still widely read by them, both Mennonites and others.

Hans de Ries has already been mentioned in this chapter.

Lubbert Gerrits, co-author with de Ries of the Waterland Confession of 1610, as well as de Ries himself really belongs to the preceding century. Gerrits was born at Amersfort in 1535, and was ordained as elder

by Dirk Philips at Hoorn in 1559. In the Flemish-Frisian controversy, in 1567, his congregation sided in with the Frisians; and thus Gerrits remained the minister of a Frisian and Upper German congregation. Later on, because of differences between himself and the majority of his congregation on questions of the ban and other strict disciplinary measures, he took the more liberal side, and as a result was expelled by the conservatives. He then became the leader in Amsterdam of what was known as the "Loose" Frisian wing of the denomination. A little later this group joined with the Upper Germans and the Waterlanders into a united congregation. Besides his co-authorship of the de Ries confession, Gerrits wrote a number of religious treatises. He was a particular friend of the poet Joost van den Vondel, and had his portrait painted by the celebrated painter M. van Mierevelt. He died in 1612.

Although the Mennonites of this period were noted in the main for their achievements in the business world, yet they contributed their full share to the cultural and scientific development of their day. They took especially to medical science. There was an unusual number of doctors among them; and since their ministry was unsalaried and untrained theologically, Mennonite preachers were frequently chosen from the medical profession. Besides Samuel Apostool, and his colleague, Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan, doctor-preachers of the Amsterdam congregation, already mentioned, might be added the name of Anton van Dale, drafted into the ministry from the doctor's office in the church at Haarlem, a great linguist in addition, but not a popular preacher, it was said, because he was too prone to flaunt his erudition by the frequent use of Latin and Greek phrases, which were beyond the understanding of his congregation. He devoted much of his spare time to the writing of theological treat-

ises, especially against the Socinians, and also a book on medical healing which attained considerable popularity in his day.

The most distinguished Mennonite doctors of this century, though they were not preachers, were undoubtedly the Bidloo brothers: Nikolaas, of Zaandam, personal physician to Peter the Great of Russia during his ship building student days in Holland, and later the director of the Czar's first school of medicine in Moscow; Govert, body physician to William III; and Lambert, a well-known apothecary of the day.

Another famous preacher during this time, though not a doctor, was Cornelis Claesz Anslo, a wealthy Amsterdam merchant, elected to the ministry in the Waterlander church in 1617. Though a famous preacher, Anslo is best known because of his intimate friendship with the great Dutch Mennonite poet, Joost van den Vondel who was at the same time also a deacon in the same church; and also for his association with the great painter, Rembrandt, who painted several portraits of the preacher, including the famous picture *A Mennonite Preacher and the Widow* now a prized possession of the National Gallery in Berlin.

Not to be omitted here among the list of famous Mennonite preachers of the time, although he properly belongs to the following century rather than to the seventeenth is Jan Deknatel, who was born in Norden, in 1698, and died in Amsterdam in 1759. After a period of study in the Remonstrant seminary in the latter city, he was ordained to the ministry in 1725. Ten years later he became one of the founders of a training school for ministers in his own church, himself remaining for a time one of the instructors. Deknatel's prominence among the religious leaders of his city is evidenced by the fact that both of the great leaders of the religious revival of

the early eighteenth century, John Wesley and Count Zinzendorf, visited him in his home and heard him preach. The former speaks of Deknatel in his Journal in terms of the highest praise, and acknowledges his indebtedness to the Mennonite preacher in his own spiritual life; while the latter shared a communion service with Deknatel in his own home on the occasion of one of his visits. Jan Deknatel, being a great preacher, wrote a number of books, including a collection of sermons, some of which were translated into German, and widely read among German speaking Mennonites in both Europe and America.

Herman Schyn, too, outlived the seventeenth century, born in 1662, and dying in 1727. Like many of his fellow preachers, he, too, was both physician and preacher; and is best known among his churchmen as the author of an early history of the Mennonites, written in both the Latin and the Dutch tongues, revised, enlarged and republished by another Amsterdam preacher, Gerhard Maatschoen later in the eighteenth century. These are only a few of a long list of prominent men who might be mentioned in a history of the Dutch Mennonites.

## THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY A PERIOD OF DECLINE

The eighteenth century witnessed a great decline among the Dutch Mennonites both numerically and spiritually. The decrease in the entire Mennonite population, according to some writers, was from one hundred sixty thousand in 1700, to thirty thousand by 1820. In many cases whole congregations disappeared, almost one hundred it was said; and in nearly all the larger cities there were material losses. The Mennonite population in Amsterdam fell from approximately twenty-five hundred in 1743, to thirteen hundred in 1832; while in Haar-



lem the reduction during the same period was from three thousand to one thousand. Other cities told the same story.

The reasons for this loss in membership were many and varied; some general, others specific. First of all, perhaps, should be mentioned the spirit of liberalism which dominated the religious life and thought of all western Europe during this period. The Mennonites in the prosperous commercial Dutch cities did not altogether escape the blighting influences of English deism, and French and German rationalism, to say nothing of the Socinianism of their own country of that day. The liberalizing influences of the French Revolution only added impetus to these tendencies among the Mennonites. Naturally the growing laxity in enforcing the old traditional regulations against mixed marriages, open communion, and worldly conformity in general contributed but little toward holding together a small religious group, the members of which were still but a tolerated people; and denied social and civil privileges which would be freely granted them if they cast their lot with the state church. One writer suggests that toleration is but a poor match for persecution in steeling the human heart against worldly temptations. Some wanted office; others social standing; and still other's wives or husbands of the Reformed faith. All these could be had by joining the state church; and many went over. The old regulations against most of these practises had been largely abandoned among the more liberal wings of the church by the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The lack of trained preachers, too, and a dearth of preachers of any sort, is given as another reason for the decline. With no adequate facilities of their own for training their preachers, the larger city congregations were inclined to select such as had been trained in the

Remonstrant schools, as already seen, and frequently even the Remonstrants themselves, whose liberal views contributed little to the maintenance of Mennonite unity; and with little material support, for the *Liefdepreeker* was still a common institution, and in the case of the smaller country churches no support at all, there was small inducement for the young men of the church to enter the ministerial profession.

To all these specific causes should be added another, more general, but nevertheless not less effective—the loosely organized congregational type of church government. Experience proves that a loosely organized religious movement can not compete with a highly organized, strictly governed, rigidly dogmatic church. History repeated itself in the case of the Mennonites.

### Socinianism Again

Although the state clergy let up in their campaign of heresy hunting against the Mennonites for a time during the latter part of the seventeenth century, they returned to the attack again with renewed determination during the early part of the eighteenth. Reluctant to give up any of their prerogatives and special privileges as leaders of the established church, they regarded with deep-seated suspicion any rival religious movement that might threaten this special status. As in all state churches, loyalty to the orthodox doctrines as formulated by their own theological doctors, was made the true test of the Christian faith by the Dutch Reformed clergy. Socinianism especially, which was unpopular with both the state and the church, remained a popular object of attack throughout the century. If any dissenting church of the period could be saddled with the charge of Socinian tendencies it would not be difficult to secure the

cooperation of the state authorities in bringing about its suppression.

The fight against the Mennonites was especially bitter in the province of Friesland, where they were still the leading Protestant rival of the state institution. While it may be true that some of the more liberal of the Waterlander churches were more or less tinged with Socinian ideas during this time, especially since the *Lamist-Zonist* controversy of the preceding century, yet there were a large number of congregations in Friesland and elsewhere in The Netherlands that were not. All Mennonites, however, whether liberal or otherwise, were easy marks for the state theologians. Mennonite preachers, as already frequently noted, not being theologically minded, consequently were not adept in the art of framing their religious views in the correct dogmatic theological phraseology of the state churchmen.

The charge of Socinianism, therefore, or any other unorthodoxy, for that matter, could be easily made against the Mennonites, who preferred biblical phraseology to that of the theologians. In 1719, a Waterlander preacher in Leeuwarden was denied the right to preach by the provincial government, because his views were not acceptable to the state clergy. In 1722, the same governing authorities passed a regulation demanding that all Mennonite preachers submit to an investigation conducted by the Reformed clergy on the questions of the trinity, whether the children who died in infancy should be eternally blessed, whether the godless must suffer eternal punishment, and whether the punishment after death would be inflicted on the same earthly body, or a new one. A little later two more Mennonite preachers were deposed.

Refusing to sign these articles unqualifiedly, and fearing a general campaign on the part of the govern-

ment to close all Mennonite churches, the Waterland congregations in Friesland met in a conference in 1738, under the presidency of Johan Stinstra, popular preacher of the Harlingen church, in which a request was made to the government asking for a repeal of the restrictions that were being imposed upon their religious liberties. Little attention, however, was paid to this request. In fact the controversy increased in bitterness, and soon centered about a book of sermons published by Stinstra in which the clergy claimed to find evidences of the proscribed doctrines. This opposition spread, until the whole Reformed church took a hand in the matter, as well as the temporal authorities, and various universities throughout The Netherlands, to whom questions of theological orthodoxy were usually submitted for solution. All these authorities with the sole exception of a lone professor of the University of Franeker, were against Stinstra, whereupon the Friesland government in 1743, forbade him to preach. It was not until 1757, that he was again reinstated. By this time the heresy-hunting mania had about run its course; and strange to say in the last named year the erstwhile outlawed preacher was actually invited to preach in the Mennonite church of the capital city before the assembled estates, the very authorities that had earlier deposed him. As noted elsewhere, by 1795, the Reformed church had lost its special privileges as a state church; and absolute religious toleration, with equal religious and civil rights for all churches was established.

### **A New Confession of Faith**

A new confession of faith appeared, the first for nearly a century, the so-called Cornelis Ris confession. Though of rather local interest at first, and likely not widely accepted in The Netherlands in its day, yet it

expresses fairly well, perhaps, the theological views of the more tolerant minded Mennonites of that time. Cornelis Ris was the minister of a church in Hoorn, North Holland. He formulated this confession evidently to serve as a common basis of faith for the union, in 1747, of two former separate congregations in the city—one a Waterlander, the other of the Frisian persuasion. But seemingly he also kept in mind the need of justifying the views of the Mennonites against their attackers. The Ris statement agreed with the anti-Socinian doctrines of the state church on such controversial questions as the trinity; the incarnation, and the redemptive functions of Jesus, expressed in biblical, rather than in philosophical phraseology, however; but on the other hand, hesitated to freely endorse their hyper-Calvinistic views on the freedom of the will, and predestination. Ris' attempt to satisfy both his conscience and the state church at the same time on this point is interesting. "God decreed," he says, "to impart His love, His grace, and His gifts in larger measure to some than to others, and this according to His own will and pleasure, but His loving kindness is so great and so far reaching, and so all inclusive, that no one is excluded therefrom without just cause." At any rate there is little need for mortal man to puzzle his brain about such matters, so thinks Ris, for "in the wisdom and ways of God, especially in this matter there are depths which will ever be regarded beyond our ability to fathom in this life."

On such Mennonite doctrines as baptism on confession of faith, non-resistance, the oath, and opposition to the holding of civil office, the Ris confession held the usual orthodox Mennonite views; on certain practises on which Mennonites were divided, the author was inclined to straddle the issue, attempting to satisfy all parties. On baptism he justified both forms. Baptism, he said "we



understand to be an immersing of the whole body in water, or a liberal sprinkling with water (which we in these northern latitudes consider more generally appropriate since the same blessings are signified)." On the church ban, another source of endless confusion, moderation is advised; as a final measure of discipline the unfaithful

must finally by a decision of the whole congregation be excluded from membership, and denied all church fellowship until he is truly converted, and gives evident proof thereof. However, all must be done with true regard to position and circumstance, yet without respect to person.

Marriage, too, should be "in the Lord"; and to be happy "we consider it essential as much as possible to remain within one's own church communion."

As already stated, this Ris confession was not widely accepted in The Netherlands, but came into common use among the churches in Germany, especially in Prussia; and in 1902 it was published in America as an acceptable statement of faith by the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America.

### **A German Visitor Reports on Dutch Mennonites**

A good description of the various brands of the Dutch Mennonites of this period is to be found in a book written by a German, Frederick Rues, in 1743, who had come to The Netherlands especially to make a study of the Mennonites. According to this book the various Mennonite factions might well be classified under two general heads—the *Fine*, and the *Coarse*. Space does not justify here anything like a detailed description of the different groups still existing except to suggest that under these two general heads are represented every shade of religious practise, ranging from the extremely

conservative Old Flemish, to the ultra liberal wings of the Waterlanders, and Remonstrants. The *Fine* still represented fairly well at this time what all Mennonites had once been; while the Coarse pointed the way to what all would finally be in the future.

Among the practises and beliefs still common to the various groups of the *Fine*, were rigid adherence to the old confessions of faith, a close following of the teaching of Menno, including his view of the incarnation and his strict use of the ban as a disciplinary measure. Because of this strict adherence to the teachings of Menno, these groups of the *Fine* wished to be known as Mennonites, in contrast with the liberals who preferred the less personal name of *Doopsgezinde*. Among the "All Finest," an excommunicant was not permitted to attend meeting with his former brethren. Marriage with outsiders was still forbidden; while candidates for membership from other factions were received only upon rebaptism. Shunning of an excommunicant was still common, including in its application the conjugal relations. Among one branch, however, the Danziger, the latter practise was not carried beyond the point of forbidding the husband or wife in question to eat at the same table with the one placed under the ban. Non-resistance was practised to its logical limits. Suing at law was not thought of, nor holding of office. Carrying of side arms, a common social custom of the day, was prohibited, likewise the transportation of goods in an armed vessel.

Worldliness in all its varied forms was carefully guarded against. The cut of a man's coat, and the style of a woman's dress were still a matter of strict regulation. Black for both was the acceptable color. Buttons, shoestrings instead of buckles, wall pictures, stained glass and portraits were all on the proscribed list among the strictest divisions. Men were supposed to wear beards,

but the preachers complained that it was becoming increasingly common for the young men to appear with shaved faces. Wigs of course in that bewigged age were not for the chosen of God, and were allowed only occasionally when the wearer could show that he wore one not from a sense of pride, but of necessity. What might constitute a necessary use was not quite clear.

All this was best exhibited among the humble country folk and the more conservative Fine groups. In the cities the women especially were inclined to chafe somewhat under these dress restrictions. They were beginning to wear silk gowns, and carry hymn books with silver clasps, if they could afford such luxury. Some of them powdered their hair, and even came to church, so says Rues, with palm leaf fans. The ministers, it is said, often looked through their fingers at these infractions of the rules among the sisters.

The ministry included three grades—the elder (bishop), preacher, and deacon. The term “bishop” used among Mennonites is somewhat misleading, and requires further explanation. Since Mennonite government is congregational, the so-called bishop’s jurisdiction does not extend beyond the limits of his own congregation. Each congregation thus may have its own bishop, who is the disciplinary official of the church; and alone has the power to baptize, administer the communion, and perform certain other rites within his own congregation, but not beyond. Elder is the more appropriate term. All ministers among the Fine served without pay; and were without special theological preparation. They came largely from the humble farmer folk, if in the country; and small tradesmen in the cities. Higher education for any purpose was not encouraged. Especially opposed were these strict groups to the schools of the Remonstrants. Since Mennonites were not permitted by the government

to have schools of their own at this time, they were inclined to make use of those of the Reformed and Lutheran churches, a fact no doubt that did not a little to cut down their own church membership, and to increase correspondently that of the recognized churches.

Worship was simple and austere. Sermons were read from manuscript in a singsong fashion by the preacher as he sat in a chair somewhat elevated above those of his fellow preachers on the same platform in the forepart of the plain meeting house. Ministers wore no special garb, in contrast to those of the more liberal branches. The worshippers prayed, kneeling, and in silence. Collections for charity were taken after the services, but the collection boxes were placed outside of the building. Since absolute harmony was required as a prerequisite to the observance of the communion service, that rite was often irregularly celebrated. All factions among the conservatives were footwashers, although the ceremony was observed in two forms. The Groninger made it a part of every communion service; while the Danziger, following the teaching of Menno himself, practised it only when receiving visiting brethren. Thus far we have described the *Fine*, who included perhaps not much more than one-fourth of the entire Mennonite body in The Netherlands.

The *Coarse* groups, making up the other three-fourths although still agreeing with the more conservative on most of the Mennonite fundamentals of doctrine, such as the independent church, adult baptism, rejection of the oath, and in the main, opposition to war, and the holding of civil office, yet they had discarded many of the ancient practises, and took a more liberal attitude on many others. The Waterlanders, as well as some of the other *Coarse* groups, permitted their members to carry side arms as a custom, not for use; to patronize

owners of armed vessels; and to hold minor civil offices. The ban was used by them sparingly, only for the punishment of the grossest sins. Mixed marriages were not forbidden, nor were candidates for membership from other Mennonite factions required to be rebaptized. Worship was still simple, though somewhat more elaborate than among the *Fine*. Ministers were both partly salaried, and educated, though not always specifically for their ministerial calling; and bore the usual title *Dominee*, like those of the state church. Prayer was audible, Hans de Ries, the Waterlander minister in Alkmaar, being the first to introduce the practise among the Mennonite churches in the preceding century. Collections for various charitable purposes were regularly taken by ushers who carried small velvet bags to which were attached small bells, designed evidently for the benefit of drowsy worshippers. On the other hand, many of the old practises had been discarded, the kiss of brotherly love, practised on baptismal occasions, and at communion time, foot washing, the marriage ceremony as a religious rite, and numerous others.

A third distinct group of Mennonites should be noted here—the *Swiss* refugees who had located in the vicinity of Groningen early in the century. These, however, were practically an alien people, belonging to the Dutch only geographically; and having little in common with the other groups either organically or culturally, though they shared the same Mennonite faith, and that in spite of the fact that all these groups had aided them most generously in their escape from Switzerland. The Swiss brought with them all their Swiss customs, and kept them throughout the century—beards, hooks and eyes, shoestrings, their Swiss dialect and all. Their story is really a part of that of the Mennonites of Switzerland, and has been told previously.



## Mennonite Virtues

This description of the Dutch Mennonites of the eighteenth century, of course, would present but a very incomplete picture and distorted view of the real place they filled in the life of their times if left to itself. There is another side to the picture that should be presented. While it must be admitted that like many of the other independent religious groups of their day, the Mennonites, too, had wasted a great deal of time quarrelling over insignificant questions of human conduct, and burned up an abundance of energy defending inconsequential differences of practises and customs long since discarded, yet it must not be forgotten that Mennonites of every group were still a sincere, honest folk, among the most substantial, often the most wealthy and highly respected in the land. Rues says they were

counted among the wealthiest of the country. If they were compelled to leave the land, the wealth and commerce of this country would suffer a very severe check.

Their conscientious regard for genuine honesty, they carried over into every detail of their daily life. Their workmanship was sincere, and their products as honest as was their insistence upon a Godly life. As artisans, they never did shoddy work. So good was their reputation among their fellows for honest work that the term *Mennisten Infijn* (Mennonite fine through and through) became a sort of trade mark for any goods of especially high quality, in the commercial circles where Mennonites were known. Although somewhat contentious, as we have just noticed, over matters of doctrine and religious practise, yet in matters of obedience to the civil law, they seemingly were among the most law abiding citizens of the land. Such misunderstandings as they had among themselves over questions of personal rights they settled

in their own churches. They seldom resorted to the courts of law. The head of the police department of the city of Amsterdam, who had filled that office for over half a century, could still say, in 1772, that during all that time not a single charge had ever been registered against a member of the large Mennonite congregation in that city.

They were also among the most liberal contributors to every worthy cause, especially to the appeal of those in distress. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they sent thousands of dollars to their oppressed brethren in Prussia, Moravia, Switzerland and the Palatinate. In 1790 they organized the *Commission for Foreign Needs* which functioned for many years, originally to aid both the Swiss refugees and the Palatine Mennonites in the hour of their distress; but indirectly also to aid many of them to find a new home in the newly founded colony of Pennsylvania. The work of this society has been discussed in the chapter on Switzerland.

Nor were the Dutch Mennonites of this period without their influence upon the general cultural and intellectual life of the land. Two organizations which have played a prominent role in the educational progress, and scientific achievements of The Netherlands during the nineteenth century had a Mennonite origin. The well-known *Teyler Institute* was founded in 1778, by a Mennonite, Pieter Teyler van der Hulst, whose ancestor, an English refugee, Thomas Taylor, had come to Holland in 1580, and joined the Haarlem Mennonite church. Pieter, who had become a wealthy manufacturer, left a large sum of money at his death for the founding of a museum of natural history and art gallery; and also, like the Swedish Nobel, after him, a fund, the income from which was to be distributed in the form of prizes to promote scientific and philosophical research. This society did

much throughout the century for the cause of genuine scholarship, and is still functioning.

Unlike the Teyler Institute, the other foundation, also organized by a Mennonite, Jan Nieuwenhuyzen, in 1784, and called the *Maatschappij tot Nut van t'Algemeen* (Society for the Promotion of the Common Good) was designed not so much for the promotion of original investigation, but rather for disseminating the general blessings of learning and culture among the common people. The first project undertaken by the society was the establishment of an elementary school system among the poorer elements of the population; for in Holland, as elsewhere, education was for the rich rather than the poor; and was regarded a church rather than a state function. This society must be given considerable credit for the founding of the Dutch public school system. In 1791, libraries for the poor were established, and later savings banks. True to the spirit of Mennonite toleration, the founder insisted that neither politics nor dogmatic religion was to have any influence in any of the undertakings of the organization; but Catholics have never taken any part in this work. Like the Teyler Institute, "*Het Nut*" as it is called, is still very much alive today. In 1927 the organization included three hundred and twenty-one local affiliated societies, supporting two hundred and five public libraries, and one hundred and fifty-two savings banks as well as many other enterprises for the benefit of the general public.

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

As everywhere else in Europe, so Holland, too, was permeated and greatly affected in its whole social and political fabric by the spirit of the French Revolution. Nor did the Mennonites entirely escape this influence.

The most far reaching by-product of the Revolutionary era, so far as the Mennonites were concerned, was perhaps the complete separation of church and state in 1795, which for the first time in three hundred years, placed Mennonites on a basis of religious and civil equality with the hitherto privileged establishment. In 1809, the government offered subsidies, similar to those granted to the state church, to such Mennonite ministers as were willing to accept them. Later on help was also offered to Mennonite charitable institutions. Mennonites accepted these gifts but sparingly, however. During the French regime in Holland, Napoleon, with his passion for uniformity and system, attempted to bring all the different independent Mennonite congregations under one consolidated organization. But being congregational in their government, the Mennonites did not take kindly to this move; and after the downfall of the usurper, they again resumed their former system of democratic church government.

The most significant event in the history of the Dutch Mennonites during the early part of the nineteenth century was the organization, in 1811, of the *Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit* (General Mennonite Society) for the purpose partly of helping weak and struggling congregations, but also to secure the united support of all for a theological seminary. By this time the factionalism that had kept the church divided for so many centuries had become considerably weakened; and with the organization of the A. D. S. the progress of unity of effort in carrying on the various common church enterprises was well under way. That the lack of a trained ministry had long been recognized among such leaders as de Haan, Deknatel, and others as one of the reasons for the decline of the church has already been referred to. But neither the local Amsterdam training school, started in a limited

fashion as early as 1735, nor the Remonstrant institutions, which some of the Mennonite candidates still attended, proving satisfactory any longer, the A. D. S. now assumed the task of training preachers in the name of all the churches.

### The Mennonite Seminary

This *Kweek* school as the seminary is called, has since affiliated with the University of Amsterdam, the two Mennonite professors supplied by the seminary being members of the theological department of the university faculty. This institution has been an important factor in unifying the various congregations; and by training practically all the preachers of the denomination, in permeating the whole church with the rather liberal views held by the seminary faculty almost from the start. Among some of the outstanding teachers during the past hundred years might be mentioned Samuel Muller (1827-1857), S. Hoekstra (1857-1892), J. de Hoop Scheffer (1860-1890), S. Cramer (1890-1912), and W. J. Kühler (1912-1947). All of these men have exerted a wide influence both within and without their own church circles through their teachings and writing. The student body is never large. Since 1911 women students have been admitted; and women are assuming increasingly important positions both as pastors and on various governing church boards.

The Mennonite Theological Seminary of Amsterdam, started more than 200 years ago, has exerted a great influence on the religious life of the Mennonite congregations. For generations there has hardly been a Mennonite congregation that has not had a graduate of this seminary as its minister. The training a minister receives is equivalent to junior college and four years of theological study.



## Periodical Literature

The seminary and the unique library of the Mennonite church of Amsterdam have been the center of Mennonite research for more than a hundred years, resulting in the publication of many books in this field and the *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, an annual scholarly publication.

The official publication of the Mennonites of Holland up to World War II was the weekly *Zondagsbode* published by the A.D.S. and the *Doopsgezinde Jaarboekje* (yearbook). In addition, the various districts and congregations published their own papers. After World War I the *Gemeentedagbeweging* published its own paper, *Brieven*. During the German occupation of World War II all publications ceased. After the war the *Doopsgezinde Weekblad*, published by the A.D.S. took the place of the *Zondagsbode* and replaced many of the smaller periodicals. Numerous books and pamphlets on vital questions on their spiritual life have meanwhile been published by the Dutch Mennonites. The Dutch Mennonites have been known for their cultural endeavors and their literary and oratorical interests for many decades.

## The Old Order Changes

With the growing demand for united and organized effort in carrying on the work of the church, there continued, at an accelerated pace, the process of undermining the old traditions and customs which was already well under way by this time—traditions and practises which for centuries had marked the Mennonites as a peculiar people. The liberal forces set loose by the French Revolution; the growing spirit of nationalism agitating Europe throughout the first half of the century; as well as nu-

merous more specific causes—the removal by the government of all religious and civil restrictions upon the dissenting religious groups; the unifying and liberalizing influences of the Mennonite seminary and the A. D. S.—all these as already intimated, tended to accelerate the movement that was already breaking up the old seclusiveness of the Mennonites. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Dutch Mennonites had already discarded many of the traditional religious practises and views of the Mennonite fathers.

One of the ancient principles given up was non-resistance. For some time the Dutch Mennonites had been growing lukewarm in the observance of this doctrine. The French Revolution found many of the young men willing to affiliate themselves with the patriotic spirit engendered throughout Holland by that event. Napoleon made no exception for religious scruples in his demand for conscripts. In the Belgian trouble in 1830, a number of young men, including several of the students in the seminary volunteered for service in that war. Up to 1850, it must be admitted, however, that most of the officials of the A. D. S., and the older leaders generally, except among a few of the extreme liberal groups, were reluctant to justify voluntary service; nor did they favor participation in political affairs, holding of political office, and accepting the state bounty offered to the ministers. According to the military regulations at that time, conscripts could be freed by the purchase of a substitute, a hardship for the poorer elements of course. But, in course of time, even these scruples disappeared. When in 1898 the new military law was passed without any special provision for exemption or for substitutes there was no protest from the Mennonites anywhere; in fact the Mennonite delegates in the States General at the time were the most outspoken in their opposition to any

exemption clause for religious scruples. So far had the Mennonites in Holland departed from their old views on this matter that some time ago one of their number was nominated as Minister of War in the government. With the migration, in 1853, of the Old Frisian congregation at Balk to America to escape military service, and the liberal influences among the Mennonites in general there were few Mennonites left in The Netherlands who held to the views of Menno on this question.\*

With the passing of non-resistance went also many of the other fundamental doctrines, not only of the Mennonite faith, but of dogmatic orthodox Christianity as well; and also, even among the more conservative groups, many old long established church practises,—among others, rigid discipline, prohibition of outside marriages, and unsalaried lay preachers.

Today, while a few of the ministers, and a larger number of laymen, might still be regarded as fairly conservative, and a greater number moderately liberal; yet a large majority of the leadership of the church would be considered as extremely unorthodox by even the most liberal groups of the American Mennonites, not only on the distinctive Mennonite principles in particular, but on the fundamentals of the Christian faith in general. This liberal majority would discard perhaps the whole doctrine of Christ's divinity, His atonement, and His redemptive power in the orthodox sense. Miracles are a myth. In fact the whole orthodox phraseology of the plan of salvation has become obsolete among them. Even the more conservative insist on being undogmatic. *Vrijzinnig* is the phrase with which they are prone to describe their religious views, which they insist, however,

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\* This congregation affiliated with the Salem congregation of the Old Mennonites near Elkhart, Indiana, and still remains one of the most conservative congregations of the conservative Old Mennonite branch of the denomination.

should be interpreted as freedom of belief, and is not to be confused with unbelief. The love of God, on the other hand, is greatly stressed in their preaching; and the Bible, freely interpreted, is still their standard of faith. Authors of nearly all the confessions of faith still in use among the Mennonites throughout the world today, the Dutch no longer follow any. In keeping with their spirit of toleration it is perhaps to be expected that the lamb and the lion should find little difficulty in lying down together. Conservatives and liberals have no difficulty in working side by side under the authority of the same A. D. S. Often two preachers of opposite views serve the same church. "Vrijzinnig" means toleration. Life, not dogma, they say, is the true test of one's Christian faith. One of their recent historians, himself moderately liberal, characterizes the fundamental principles of present day Mennonitism in Holland as

1. Undogmatic
2. Baptism on confession of faith
3. Rejection of the oath
4. Congregational independence

Realizing perhaps that they have strayed far from the views originally held by their founder, the descendants of Menno's folk now hesitate to call themselves Mennonites, preferring rather the more general term Doopsgezinde. Until recently they have not cultivated much interest in the leadership of Menno himself. The last edition of his works, as previously indicated, was published in 1681. With the exception of one or two brief sketches, no comprehensive study of his life has been written until the appearance in 1914 of the work by K. Vos, and the history of the Dutch Mennonites in the sixteenth century by Dr. W. J. Kühler, in 1932.

## Remnants of the Old Faith

Although they have admittedly departed considerably from the old standards, the subjects of this sketch nevertheless, rather strange to say, have retained two of the ancient doctrines—insistence upon adult baptism, and rejection of the oath. Young people are given a long period of catechetical instruction before admission to church membership, and are seldom baptized before their twentieth year, and often later. There seems to be a tendency among some of the congregations to minimize the need of the ceremony at all. In some cases married couples attend church regularly, and enjoy all the usual privileges of membership, and assume all the obligations without ever being baptized. Some time ago there was an interesting case in one of the churches of several young men who were refused by the government the usual privilege of exemption from the oath because of the fact that they were not baptized, and thus not entitled to the exemption as Mennonites, although they had been regular paying members of the congregation. The objection to the oath, too, perhaps has been retained because, like adult baptism, it symbolizes religious toleration and separating of church and state, which have always remained, after all, two of the fundamental principles of Mennonitism; and which have always distinguished the Mennonites from the state churches of their day. It would seem, however, that with the rejection of non-resistance there would be little logical reason for refusing the oath.

The Dutch Mennonites retained also to a marked degree those sober virtues of moral integrity, and simplicity of living which all through their history distinguished their forefathers as a superior people.

## Mennonite Meetinghouses

Mennonite meetinghouses in The Netherlands, like



some Mennonite meetinghouses in America, are still inclined to be severely plain and simple in appearance, without stained glass, tower or bell; and, if over one hundred years old, and in the city, likely to be located some distance back from the main street, a reminder of the days when Mennonites were still merely a tolerated people, with few civil and religious rights, and not permitted to carry on their proscribed worship in public places. The large church in Amsterdam is hidden from view by a group of office buildings between it and the street. One unacquainted with Mennonite ecclesiastical architecture would hardly suspect that the modest little door opening upon the Singel was an entrance to a house of worship. In Leeuwarden, Sneek, and a number of other cities the buildings in front of the church have since been removed, thus leaving an open court between the street and the meeting house.

The original meetinghouse along the Singel in Amsterdam, erected in the sixteenth century, and changed but little in its general style of architecture by later remodelings, is a fair sample of the old type of church structure. On the inside, the room is large and nearly square. Along the north wall, nearly in the middle, stands an elevated pulpit reached by a short stairway, and topped by a canopy something like a sounding board though not meant for that purpose. On each side of the pulpit extends a high bench for the use of the black-gloved, silk-hatted ruling elders, and nearby another short bench for the song leader. Around the other three sides run two balconies, and directly beneath, on the first floor several rows of benches with long desks in front for Bibles and hymn books. These benches are for the exclusive use of the men of the congregation, just as they were two hundred years ago. The women are seated on movable chairs which occupy the large square in the

center of the floor. Under each of these chairs one still finds small perforated wooden boxes which are filled in winter with heated stones to warm the feet of the older women, a convenience common to our New England great-grandmothers in the colonial days. Over in one corner of the big room looms the big drum stove. The seating capacity of the house may be about fifteen hundred. Such in brief is the simple appearance of one of the oldest Mennonite meeting houses in the world, in which worships the largest, the most influential, and no doubt the wealthiest congregation of the entire denomination.

Church loyalty among the Dutch Mennonites is not taken as seriously as in America, where one is inclined to look for nearly a hundred percent of church attendance, especially in the country churches. Although the Amsterdam membership counts up over seven thousand, the writer found only some three hundred worshippers in attendance in the house on the Singel, in the course of a visit one Sunday morning several years ago. Two hundred at the other church in the city that same Sunday brought the entire attendance to about five hundred, a fair average he was told for the year. The Rotterdam church with a nominal membership of over one thousand does well, it is said, to draw an average of two hundred to its worship service. This condition prevails throughout the city churches, though in the country the attendance is somewhat better. Membership, too, in many cases is merely nominal. Many keep their names on the membership rolls, and even pay their church dues long after they have ceased to attend services at all.

### **The Amsterdam Congregation**

The Amsterdam congregation is well organized. A card index record is kept of all the members, many of

whom of course are not known personally to the four ministers or other church officials, with statistics as to birth, baptism, names of the two sponsors still required of every applicant for baptism and marriage, and such other information as may be of value to the church authorities. The records include over four thousand family names.\* This number would seem to be entirely out of proportion to the size of the congregation, if it were not for the fact that among the Mennonites in Holland there are many more divided families in the membership than in America. In many cases a husband, wife or child may be the only Mennonite member of the family, while the rest may be scattered among other evangelical churches or none, or may occasionally even be of the Catholic faith. This condition, quite common in Holland, scarcely prevails among Mennonites in other parts of the world, where Mennonite settlements are inclined to be compact, homogeneous and for the most part rural.

Some of the large congregations possess valuable libraries on the history and the literature of their own faith. The most comprehensive of these is the one in Amsterdam of which there is a printed catalogue. Most of the larger congregations also support their own children's homes, sanitariums, and other charitable and philanthropic institutions for their own people, a practise carried by Dutch Mennonites to Prussia, Russia and later to the western prairies of North America. To take care of their own unfortunate has always been a trait among the Mennonites everywhere deeply rooted in their historical traditions.

### Political and Economic Influence

The fact that the Mennonites of The Netherlands live

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\* These statistics are of 1926.

in the cities is the chief reason, no doubt, why they have been much more influential in the intellectual and commercial circles of their own nation than their brethren in other countries. Like the Quakers in England, and like the Jews in America the Mennonites of Holland enjoy an authority far out of proportion to their mere numerical strength, especially in financial and economic, as well as in political matters. In Amsterdam nearly all the banks of the city are likely to have one or more Mennonites on their board of directors, including occasional presidents, among others recently, the late Vissering, the former president of the National Central Bank of The Netherlands. During the past decades Mennonites have furnished several Cabinet members, a Governor General of the East Indies, the first president of the World Court, several members of the highest court of justice, and captains of industry, painters, professors, and doctors of the highest rank. Some time ago of the twenty-eight deputies in the popular house of the States General four were Mennonites, while of the twenty-seven in the upper house three were from the same faith. Of one hundred members of the Royal Academy of Sciences eleven were of the Mennonite denomination, a representation far out of proportion to their numbers.

In numbers, the Dutch Mennonites have made a steady though rather slow growth during the past century. In 1850 the total Mennonite population, including children, approximated forty thousand, which has grown to about seventy thousand at the present time, scattered through one hundred and thirty congregations. Of these, about forty thousand are now found in the provinces of the two Hollands, about fifteen thousand in Friesland; and the rest scattered about through Groningen, and several other northern provinces. The largest increase has been in the city congregations, due

largely to migration from the country churches. Amsterdam now has a total Mennonite population, including children, of some ten thousand. In Haarlem there are according to recent statistics in round numbers about three thousand and five hundred Mennonite souls; in The Hague, three thousand; in Rotterdam nearly two thousand; in Groningen seventeen hundred; and in Leeuwarden, a prominent Anabaptist center in Menno's day, about fifteen hundred.

### Missionary Activities

The first organized Mennonite mission work originated in Holland in 1847, when the *Mennonite Association for the Spread of the Gospel in the Dutch Colonies* was founded in Amsterdam. Soon the Mennonites of Germany, Russia, and Switzerland joined the Dutch in this enterprise. Thus in 1947, even though it was a dark hour, the Mennonites of Europe could look back on a century of their own organized missionary activities.

The first missionary to go out under the Mennonite Association of Amsterdam was P. Jansz who baptized his first converts in 1854 at Japara, Java. Jansz was later joined by a number of other Dutch Mennonite missionaries including his own son, P. A. Jansz, and some medical missionaries. P. Jansz translated the Bible into the Javanese language for the British Bible Society. The first Mennonite missionary from Russia to join the Dutch mission was Johann Fast in 1888. He was followed by Johann Hübert and Johann Klaassen. Heinrich Dirks started a new mission field in Sumatra in 1871 and was followed by numerous other Mennonite missionaries from Russia. The American Mennonites also considered joining in the Dutch efforts when P. A. Penner was to be sent out. After World War I when the Russian support was



cut off, J. M. Leendertz visited the American Mennonite congregations to create interest in their mission work. The response was negligible.

World War II and its aftermath had a disastrous effect in the home countries as well as on the mission field. During the war The Netherlands were cut off from the Dutch East Indies. The missionaries from Russia then serving in the field had grown old. Holland had not furnished any for some time. The German missionaries, H. Schmitt and O. Stauffer, were interned and later became war casualties leaving the Swiss missionary, D. Amstutz, and the Dutch medical doctor, K. P. C. A. Gramberg, as the main representatives on the mission fields. Fortunately, they succeeded in organizing the mission congregations into an independent mission church with its own constitution and articles of faith. During the Japanese occupation, immediately after this move, Mohammedan fanatics started a "holy war" against everything that reminded them of Western civilization. The remaining missionaries were interned and much of the fruit of the labor of a century was destroyed. After the liberation in August, 1945, the Javanese began the struggle for national independence. These conditions again rendered work by European missionaries impossible. The organized native churches carry on while the Dutch Mission Association hopes to resume its work as soon as possible. Meanwhile, some of the Mennonite Central Committee workers reached the Dutch East Indies to lend a helping hand "in the name of Christ" to those whom they can serve in the overcrowded islands.

### *Gemeentedagbeweging*

Although Holland was not directly involved in World War I, the Dutch Mennonites were greatly stirred by that catastrophe; and like their brethren in other parts

of the world, they were driven to a more serious consideration of those fundamental principles of their forefathers which they had long since abandoned. A small group of those most concerned about this matter, most of whom had for some time been attending a series of Quaker meetings at Woodbrooke, England, the chief objective of which was to revive among the English Quakers a keener interest in the old time Quaker spirit, just then at ebb tide, met in 1917, at Utrecht for the purpose of starting a similar Woodbrooke movement among the Mennonites, under the name of *Gemeentedag van Doopsgezinden*.

The exact purpose of this new movement was perhaps at first not quite clear, though it was hoped by the sponsors that it might somehow promote a warmer appreciation among both laity and the ministry of the earlier practical piety of traditional Mennonitism, and also deepen the personal spiritual and religious experiences of the brotherhood. As it expanded, however, its aims became more clearly defined. Its activities today are grouped under the heads, called *Arbeidsgroepen*—Bible study, missions, war resistance, and temperance. In each of these fields increased interest has been aroused throughout the whole church by this *Gemeentedagbeweging*. The movement has remained largely undogmatic in spite of the attempts on the part of an evangelical minority to make it otherwise. Practical piety, and a deeper spiritual life are stressed in all its activities. In 1922, a separate youth movement was organized in connection with the parent *Gemeentedag*; and the two have worked in close harmony since.

At first, the meetings of the *Gemeentedag* were held at Utrecht, later for a few years in a more or less public camping ground at Lunteren. In 1925 the first of several open camps was built by voluntary contributions on an

open heath at Elspeet, with a fine assembly hall, and a series of barrack-like sleeping rooms. These open camps, called "Brotherhood Houses," have since become the centers of much of the spiritual and recreational life of the more progressive and youthful element of the whole denomination. Regional Gemeentedag, or Brotherhood meetings as they may be called, are also held now in various local churches throughout the country.



Elspeet Retreat Grounds. Dining Hall

## Mennonite World Conference

The third Mennonite World Conference, devoted especially to the commemoration of the conversion of Menno Simons in 1536, took place in Holland in 1936. Representatives of Mennonites the world over had the opportunity of acquainting themselves with the land of Menno and his followers of our day in that country. The meeting took place in the venerable church of Amsterdam, on the camping grounds of the *Gemeentedagbeweging* at Elspeet, and at Witmarsum, the place where Menno Simons was born and converted. Questions of

the past and those which faced the Mennonites everywhere at that time were discussed. It was a memorable event though the clouds of war were even then visible on the horizon.

## World War II.

On May 9, 1940, the German Army invaded Holland and soon this freedom loving country was totally occupied. Great were the losses and destruction of property and lives. Several of the Mennonite churches, including the one at Rotterdam, were totally destroyed. The functioning of the Mennonite Theological Seminary of Amsterdam was interrupted and some Mennonite ministers lost their lives in concentration camps. The economic life of The Netherlands was disrupted and adjusted to the war economy of Germany. And again as in the time of Napoleon, which gave birth to the founding of the A.D.S. (*Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit*), the Dutch Mennonites were stirred; and as in World War I, a need and a hunger for a deeper and more meaningful spiritual life were felt.

## New Life

When, after the liberation, the A.D.S. met again, new tasks and new visions confronted and beckoned the organization. When the A.D.S., during its session in 1945, listened to the message of its chairman, C. Nijdam, there was a new note in it. The meetings of the A.D.S. up to that time had been mostly business meetings and the organization itself a business institution. Previously no one had expected spiritual guidance from this organization. The need of spiritual reconstruction and guidance was, however, the keynote of his message. What the *Gemeentedagbeweging* had been striving for, namely the

revitalizing of the spiritual life of the brotherhood, now became the concern of the A.D.S. The *Gemeentedagbewing* itself became a part of the A.D.S. Another division, newly created, was that of spiritual guidance. The reorganization of the publications has been referred to. It was also entirely new for a congregation like Amsterdam to adopt something like an outline of faith based on the Mennonite Central Committee statement of faith. The former extreme individualism in religious matters and the liberal theological views have been modified considerably in the direction of a more Bible- and Christ-centered Christian life and preaching. We have to take note of the fact that great changes have taken place in the Mennonite brotherhood of Holland since World War I and again since World War II. Considerable interest is shown in relief work, non-resistance, and missionary endeavors. The war experience taught the Mennonite congregations to work in close harmony with the other Protestant churches of Holland. The A.D.S. is a member of the World Council of Churches.

### **Contacts with American Mennonites**

Contacts with American Mennonites were established again on a larger scale than ever before after World War II when relief was administered in Holland through the Mennonite Central Committee. Relief units distributed food and clothing in devastated cities and helped in the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the flooded island of Walcheren. In many cases the Dutch Mennonites joined as individuals as well as officially in these enterprises. The Dutch were especially helpful in assisting and caring for the Mennonite refugees from Russia who were fortunate enough to cross the border into Holland. The Dutch Mennonites had personal and intimate contacts with the American Mennonites through relief



work as well as through a large-scale student exchange program by which Dutch Mennonite students were enabled to attend Mennonite colleges in America. Numerous Mennonite delegates attended the fourth Mennonite World Conference at Goshen, Indiana, and North Newton, Kansas, traveling extensively afterwards and visiting Mennonite congregations in the United States and Canada. These contacts of the Dutch Mennonites, with their remarkable and unique past and the contributions which they have made in religious and cultural realms, with the present more activist Mennonite congregations of America have already proved to be a mutual blessing and will, no doubt, continue to bear fruit in the future.

Among the centers of contact between the Dutch and the American Mennonites are the Mennonite Central Committee home of Amsterdam (Koningslaan 58) and "Heere-wegen" near Utrecht. The latter is operated jointly by the Dutch and American Mennonites. American students and scholars have been and are making use of the rich Dutch Mennonite heritage in such centers as the Mennonite Library and Archives of Amsterdam.

## V

### NORTHERN GERMANY

As noted elsewhere the Mennonites, by the middle of the sixteenth century, were restricted to two well-defined areas—Switzerland and The Netherlands, to which may be added a third, Moravia, if the Hutterites are included. The present congregations of South Germany and France are all of Swiss origin, while those of North Germany came from The Netherlands largely, though in the course of time a few native Germans and Swiss were added. By this time the fervid missionary zeal which had characterized the earlier spread of Anabaptism had been almost entirely stamped out by relentless persecution. Mennonites no longer had the heart to look for new recruits, only too glad to escape with their own lives, and thankful if they might hold their own. The growth of Mennonitism after this was rather the swarming of a people than the expansion of a faith.

In North Germany, along the Baltic and the North Sea, the Dutch Mennonite refugees, fleeing from the atrocities of Spanish rule, located in two well-defined areas—just across the Dutch border in northwestern Germany; and farther east along the Baltic in the delta of the Vistula and nearby coast line. It will be the province of this chapter to describe the eastward expansion of these Dutch refugees.

#### NORTHWEST GERMANY

The settlements in northwest Germany may be roughly classed into three groups—East Friesland, the Lower Elbe, and the Lower German Rhine.

## East Friesland

The independent little county of East Friesland, directly across the Dutch border in the extreme north-west corner of Germany, was just outside the immediate control of Charles the Fifth as tyrant of The Netherlands, and far enough removed from his Habsburg capital as emperor of the Germans, to assume somewhat of an independent attitude toward the great religious questions then agitating central Europe. Quite early, the local counts had turned favorably toward the Reformation movement, but for a time they remained undecided which of the parties, Lutheran or Reformed, to follow. To John a Lasco, a Polish nobleman, was committed the task of working out a satisfactory religious system for the East Frieslanders. In the end, a Lasco decided largely for the Reformed establishment.

During this transition period the local rulers assumed a somewhat tolerant attitude toward religious dissent; and East Friesland became a rallying place for religious refugees from neighboring lands, including Anabaptists from Holland. Not that the first Anabaptists here were all refugees. In fact Anabaptism likely had an indigenous growth in the country. Melchior Hoffman's activities in and about Emden have already been noted, and those of his disciples—Jan Tripmaker, who first planted the banner of the new movement in Amsterdam the same year, and in the next forfeited his life for the cause at The Hague; and Sicke Freriks, whose execution a few years later at Leeuwarden, started Menno Simons on his career as a reformer.

Menno himself, as already noted, went in and out from Emden for many years, as did his co-workers, Dirk Philips, and the latter's brother, Obbe, as well as Leonard Bouwens and other early leaders. Here, too, were held many important conferences during the century, and

Anabaptist meetings of all sorts, including the great debate with the clergy of the Reformed establishment in 1578.

### **Emden, Leer, and Norden**

With the end of persecution in The Netherlands, near the close of the sixteenth century, Mennonite migration to East Friesland ceased. The settlements here from this time on remained few and small. By 1700 the congregation in and about *Aurich*, the official residence of the ruling counts, had died out, and only three centers remained—*Emden*, *Leer*, and *Norden*. The total membership of all three never exceeded several hundred.

While few, if any Mennonites, were ever put to death in East Friesland because of their faith, nevertheless they were never granted more than a limited toleration. They always remained subject to the whims and prejudices of arbitrary rulers. Some counts were worse than others. Frequently throughout the sixteenth century, urged by neighboring Dutch regents to break up refugee settlements, or by Habsburg emperors to enforce the Edict of Speier of 1529, or by the local clergy to root out all religious dissent, obliging East Friesland counts occasionally ordered Mennonites out of the county with bag and baggage. But these orders seemingly were never taken seriously by the latter, and seldom carried out by the former.

In 1544 Countess Anna, although one of the most liberal of the early rulers, upon the request of Maria, regent of The Netherlands at the time, issued an order for the expulsion of all Anabaptists within her jurisdiction. But, advised by John a Lasco to differentiate between the more or less fanatical groups that still infested her lands, the Batenburger, Davidians and Münsterites

on the one hand, and the followers of the peaceful Menno on the other, she limited her order to the former only. Referring to these latter, the countess made use of the term *Menist*, the name by which this group is generally known after this. Menno, however, thought it best to leave. He spent the next two years in the archbishopric of Cologne.

And so, toleration remained but a relative term. Mennonites, even under the most liberal regime, were forced to worship in secret. Even after church buildings were permitted, they had to be erected along back streets, and in out-of-the-way places without tower or bell. This latter provision, however, seemingly was not much of a hardship; for on one occasion, at least, the Reformed clergy of Norden complained to the magistrate that "the impudent Mennonites go to church to the sound of our own bells."

The toleration act of 1627, granted by the liberal Count Rudolf Christian, guaranteed the Mennonites only the legal rights of worship and warned them especially against luring any of the faithful from the true church with "honeyed words." For this privilege each family was to pay the governing authorities the annual sum of six thaler. Marriage could be performed only by the regular clergy; the full rights of citizenship were still withheld; freedom from military service and from the oath always remained a subject for further negotiation, and was usually transmuted to a money payment.

Even as late as the more liberal charter granted by Carel Edzard in 1738, worship still had to be carried on without open display and without propaganda. Mennonites by this time, however, might be married by their own ministers and according to their own customs; but the regular Reformed pastor was still entitled to his fee



of one-half thaler, nevertheless, partly as a gift, but largely, no doubt, to insure the continuation of their privileges; and a record of the marriage must be kept in the church register. The ministers from the outside were granted the right of visit. Military exemption was conceded without the payment of the usual exemption money.

In 1744, East Friesland came under the jurisdiction of the king of Prussia, at which time the combined Mennonite churches paid the new ruler one thousand thaler. After this the Mennonites here, with a few exceptions, enjoyed the liberties, and shared the restrictions common to their brethren throughout the kingdom of Prussia. During, and after the Napoleonic wars, East Friesland came under the control successively of Holland, Hanover and finally Prussia again.

Of the three congregations in East Friesland today, Leer, Norden, and Emden, the last is perhaps the most important, and the oldest. In fact it is the oldest existing Mennonite congregation in the world, having had a continued existence since 1530. The congregation has never been large. Small as the Emden group has been, however, it has given both the church and the state a long list of prominent men. In addition to the many above-mentioned church leaders who served the congregation in the sixteenth century there should be added in more recent times men and women who were prominent in affairs of both church and state—the Brons family—Anna, author of the first comprehensive history of the Mennonites in the German language, now passed through its third edition; Isaac Brons, her husband, deputy to the Frankfurt Parliament in 1848, president of the East Friesland Navy League in 1861, and member of the Reichstag of the North German Confederation in 1867; and their son Bernard, leading citizen of Emden, chief magistrate for fourteen years, Swedish consul at one time for that

sea port, and last but by no means least, for thirty years deacon in his home church.

Under the able leadership of Abraham Fast the membership of the Emden congregation, which had dwindled down to thirty-two in 1918, had increased by 1932 to over three hundred. These accessions were primarily people of non-Mennonite background.

During World War II Emden was almost totally destroyed by a twenty-minute air raid. Only a few members of the congregation were not bombed out. Totally destroyed were also the old and beautiful Mennonite church dating back to 1769 and the parsonage. Gone were also the valuable archives dating back for three hundred years. The church and parsonage at Leer remained intact and the minister then moved to this location. The destruction, dislocation of peoples and loss of life incident to the war, as well as the greatly increased number of people requiring pastoral care because of the coming of the empty-handed Mennonites from the east, put a heavy load on the ministerial task after World War II.

In addition to the care of the congregation at Emden, Leer, and Norden, the pastor also cares for the Mennonite congregation at Gronau, at the Dutch border, in the province of Westphalia. Some of the Mennonites of Gronau were leading silk industrialists, such as the van Deldens. Originally this congregation was served by Dutch ministers. All these congregations are members of the A.D.S. as well as of *Die Vereinigung der deutschen Mennonitengemeinden*. After World War I a number of Russian Mennonite families found shelter in Gronau, and after World War II the Mennonite Central Committee maintained a large displaced persons camp in Gronau. The industrial life as well as the life of the congregation suffered severely in the war.

## The Lower Elbe

Dutch Mennonite refugees also found their way throughout the latter half of the sixteenth century to the free cities and the isolated country places along the river deltas and sea coasts of Schleswig-Holstein. The principal settlements here were along the lower Elbe, between Hamburg and Lübeck, down the Elbe from here, and up the coast as far as the marsh lands of the lower Eider. Coming as they did directly from Holland, where they had long known the technique of ditch digging and dike building, they felt at home among the swamps of this region. They soon built up productive farms where there had been nothing but waste before, and brought prosperity to cities by their thrift in industry, and skill in commerce; and by so doing earned the gratitude and the protection of their benefactors. Many of the Mennonites were weavers; others were fishermen; all loved the sea; some became merchant princes in course of time, wealthy and influential.

Among the earliest of the Mennonite communities here was the one established in the marsh lands of the lower Eider, in the southwestern corner of Schleswig and the northwestern border of Holstein. Here at first they were hardly tolerated, but by the beginning of the seventeenth century were granted more liberal privileges of worship, and the right to make their living by farming in the open country, and by trade and commerce in the cities, in spite of the efforts of the Lutheran clergy to annihilate them. The generous terms granted the Mennonites in Friedrichstadt a little later were also applied to the settlements along the lower Eider. In fact these various small scattered communities in the open country never organized congregations of their own, but remained an organic part of the Friedrichstadt church. Propaganda

of course was not allowed. Nor were they inclined to make inroads into the state church. The only accessions to Mennonitism from the outside were occasional servants who joined the church of their employers, no doubt, usually of their own volition without any persuasion from their masters and mistresses. But even these humble recruits were often made the occasion of serious attempts on the part of the Lutheran clergy to curtail the privileges of the Mennonites.

By the middle of the nineteenth century there were no Mennonites left in the open country of the Eider lowlands. That they survived so long is an eloquent tribute to the tenacity and genuineness of their religious convictions. At best it would seem almost an impossibility for a widely scattered and isolated people, speaking a foreign tongue, and practising a proscribed religion, the object of the jealousies of a powerful state church, to maintain and perpetuate their own religious institutions. But the Mennonites here held their own for over two centuries. Among the causes given by the writers of their own history for their final dissolution as an organized religious group are the education of their children in Lutheran schools, mixed marriages, the children of which according to the law of 1751 must be regarded as members of the state church, and the loss by the close of the eighteenth century of many of the simple and pious Christian virtues of their early forefathers, to which should be added also the mistake of continuing their worship in a foreign tongue long after it had ceased to be the language of everyday life among the younger generation.

### **Friedrichstadt**

The congregation in *Friedrichstadt*, a little farther up the river, still exists. The city of Friedrichstadt was

founded in the beginning of the seventeenth century with the consent of the reigning duke by a group of tolerant Remonstrants. In 1623 Mennonites, too, were granted full religious toleration, including a recognition of their scruples against the oath, military service and police duty. Perhaps nowhere else in all Germany at that time did Mennonites enjoy such religious rights as here, although their status was still merely that of a tolerated people without any inherent civil or religious rights. Their privileges however, did not include the right of expansion at the expense of the prevailing established church. When the king of Denmark fell heir to the duchy of Holstein, he confirmed all these privileges. The Mennonites here always played an important role in the commercial and industrial life of the city, although they never, even in the later years, took an active part in political matters with the exception of an occasional election to the city council or the office of burgomaster.

The Friedrichstadt church was never large. It reached its greatest prosperity about 1700 when it numbered about four hundred members; one hundred years later, as a result of marriage restrictions encouraged by the Lutheran church, the scattered membership in the open country about the town and the insistence upon the use of the Dutch language in a German environment, this number had dwindled to less than fifty, which is about the present membership. It was from the pastorate of this church that C. J. van der Smissen, the first theological professor, and later the principal of the Wadsworth school, was called to his American field of labor in 1868.

On the right bank of the Elbe, between Hamburg and the sea lies *Glückstadt*, once the seat of a prosperous Mennonite congregation. This town was founded in 1616 by Christian IV of Denmark, who, desirous of attracting thrifty settlers to the new city, offered complete religious



liberty to various oppressed sects of the surrounding countries, with many other special privileges, freedom of worship, the right to carry on trade and commerce, and exemption from military service; but for the latter an annual tribute had to be substituted. Mennonites came here almost from the first.

Among the prominent business men of this city was Gysbert van der Smissen, founder of the well-known Mennonite family of van der Smissens in northwestern Germany, who had come to Glückstadt in 1643, but later left for Altona. Gysbert was a merchant prince in his day, and was responsible for making his city one of the most important sea ports along the entire coast. His ships found their way to all the ports of north and south Europe, and Greenland, where he engaged extensively in the whale fisheries. When van der Smissen left for Altona, and took his business with him, the Mennonite congregation here began to decline. By 1740 the last Mennonite family in Glückstadt had disappeared.

In the Hamburg-Lübeck region, Anabaptists of the Mennonite type were found soon after the middle of the sixteenth century. One of the earliest of the refugees here was Cord Roosen, founder of a long line of influential Mennonites who had come originally from the duchy of Jülich. He located near Lübeck; others followed him from the same duchy and from Cologne and Holland, as well as from other intolerant lands of the northwest.

By 1543 or earlier, as noted elsewhere, a small colony had founded a Mennonite village called *Wüstenfeld* on an estate called Fresenburg, the possession of Count Bartholomäus von Ahlefeld, not far from the present town of Oldesloe. In this village it will be remembered Menno himself found his final resting place, and here he lies buried in what was supposed to be his own garden.

The settlement was completely destroyed in 1627 when the armies of Tilly and Wallenstein raided northern Germany in the course of the Thirty Years' War. Most of the members then left for Lübeck and Altona, but a few remained a while longer in Fresenburg. The last recorded mention of this community, in 1656, indicates that at that time there were only three members left.

### **Hamburg-Altona**

Before the close of the sixteenth century a congregation had also been formed in the free city of Hamburg, and in the neighboring village of *Altona*, the latter under the political jurisdiction at the time of the counts of Schauenberg, vassals to the duke of Holstein. Refugees came here principally from Holland, Cologne, and the duchy of Jülich. At first little toleration was accorded to Anabaptists of any variety, and orders were sent out to the faithful not to harbor them nor to rent them houses nor lands. But by the seventeenth century the ruling authorities had become a bit more lenient, although the usual restrictions against publicity, and propaganda were still in force, and in Altona an annual tax of one thaler per head was collected. Somewhat later these privileges were extended, and confirmed by the king of Denmark when he assumed the title of duke of Holstein in 1741. When, in 1672, Emperor Leopold reminded the authorities of the Free City of Hamburg that the Menonites were not one of the three tolerated religions, the Senate defended them, replying that they were a peaceful, industrious and useful people, and not at all to be confused with the fanatical Münsterites against whom the imperial edicts had originally been directed. As elsewhere, so here also, however, the Lutheran clergy were entirely out of sympathy with the liberal policy of the magistrates. As late as 1764, the former secured the

passage of a regulation forbidding intermarriage between Mennonites and Lutherans.

In course of time the Hamburg-Altona Mennonites became prosperous, and many of them wealthy, being engaged largely in commercial enterprises, and the whale fisheries. When in 1674 they proposed to erect a new church building, it was agreed among the wealthier merchants that they would each contribute five percent of the net proceeds of the season's catch in the northern waters toward this purpose. Tradition says that the season's return was unusually large and more than enough to meet the demands of the new building. In 1713, when, in the course of the Swedish war, the city was destroyed by fire, the losses of Heinrich van der Smissen, one of the well-to-do members, was two breweries and eighteen houses.

The two settlements in Hamburg and Altona formed one community, but all the divisions present in Holland were transplanted here, Frisian, Flemish and High German, to which were added a little later, several others. In course of time these were united into one congregation, on the basis of the conservative Olive Branch confession of faith. The united congregation, which for a long time remained in close touch with the parent communities in Holland, was classed with the Dutch *Zonist* faction. The present meetinghouse of the congregation is in Altona. When in 1678 the celebrated minister Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan of Amsterdam, founder of the *Lamist* faction in Holland visited the Hamburg-Altona church hoping to preach there, the local congregation decided to test his orthodoxy before permitting him to preach. He passed the examination to the satisfaction of the church council on such questions as the necessity of water baptism, the admission of the truly converted only to the communion table, the

equality of the Son with the Father, and the need of a written confession of faith. Galenus was given permission to preach, but was warned not to advocate any practises contrary to those of the Altona-Hamburg congregation, among others that of observing silent prayer. The local minister at the time was Gerhard Roosen.

### The Roosen Family

Gerhard, or Gerrit, as he is frequently called, is the best known of a long line of distinguished members of the Roosen family. Cord, the founder of the Holstein branch has already been mentioned. Paul the father of Gerhard came to Altona from Fresenburg in 1611. The last of a long line of preachers was Berend Carl, who, in 1904, ended a sixty year pastorate of the Altona church. Gerhard, who was born in Hamburg in 1612, was a wealthy ship owner as well as a preacher, and served his congregation for sixty-two years without pay, as was the custom at that time, during a critical period in the history of the local church. Among other troublesome occasions through which he safely directed his people was an episode in 1648, when a group of applicants for membership, due to some outside influence, some say that of an English Baptist, demanded to be baptized by immersion, at the same time also advocating other innovations, including foot washing before communion, and the observance of the Lord's Supper in the evening with unleavened bread. In spite of Roosen's tactful handling of the situation, a division could not be averted. A small group seceded and organized an immersionist, or *dompelaar* branch of the church which lasted for over one hundred years.

Roosen was also the author of several books, one of which, a sort of catechism, first printed in 1702, and issued frequently afterward, was widely used for over

two centuries among the Mennonites of both South Germany and America. He travelled extensively in Europe, and carried on a voluminous correspondence with his Mennonite brethren on both sides of the Atlantic. It was to him that the Germantown Mennonites wrote for advice with reference to the installation of the first minister for the American church. He died an accidental death in 1711, having lived just four months less than a full century.

### **Jacob Denner**

Jacob Denner, the last of the "dompelaar" preachers, who died in 1746, was another man of unusual influence. He was first a minister in the Hamburg-Altona congregation, but later joined the immersionists. He was an eloquent preacher, and his sermons were largely attended by even the nobility and other men of influence. It is said that the Crown Prince of Sweden on the occasions of his visits to Hamburg often heard him. Denner was an extensive traveller, a deep student of the sciences, a school teacher, as well as a preacher. He, too, was a *liefdeprediker*, for preaching was a side issue with him. His real vocation was that of dyer.

Denner also wrote a number of books including a book of sermons first published in the Dutch in 1707; then translated into German in 1730; and reprinted several times since, including the Frankenthal edition of 1792 published especially by two Pennsylvanians for the Pennsylvania church. The book was widely read by Mennonites until well into the nineteenth century.

### **The van der Smissen Family**

Another prominent Hamburg family was that of van der Smissen, several of whose members have already



been mentioned—Gysbert, the founder of the Holstein branch who left Friedrichstadt for Glückstadt in 1643, and the latter place for Altona in 1682; Hinrich, the Hamburg merchant of a later period; and Carl Justus, of Friedrichstadt. There remains Hinrich, for many years, including the trying period of World War I, the editor of the *Mennonitische Blätter*, and late pastor of the Altona congregation.

In 1700 the membership of the congregation consisted of approximately 700. At the beginning of this century, the congregation had less than 400 members. In 1914 a large church building with a parish hall and parsonage was erected. Because of the influx of refugees from the East after World War II, the membership of the congregation increased to nearly 1,000.

### **During World War II**

During World War II about 50 per cent of the residence of Hamburg-Altona were destroyed in a few hours, during one week in July, 1943. Members of the Mennonite congregation suffered in proportion. Such Mennonite historical markers as the van der Smitten Allee, the chapel in the Mennonite cemetery, the venerable old Mennonite church of the *Grosse Freiheit* erected 1716, which now was used as a city mission, were completely destroyed.

Numerous other evidences of Mennonite industry and thrift in Altona have been erased. Surrounded by a heap of rubble, the new church and adjoining buildings erected in 1914 still stand even though they suffered severely from the war. Again it has become the center of spiritual and physical aid for hundreds of Mennonite refugees from Prussia and Russia even as in the days of the Thirty Years' War when this congregation originated.

Otto Schowalter has been the pastor of this church since 1928.

### **The Lower German Rhine**

Mennonites were found along the Lower Rhine in the duchies of Jülich, Cleve, and Berg, the archbishopric of Cologne, and the other small principalities in this area all through the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The more or less fanatical Anabaptist groups, also, Batenburger, Davidians, and a few Münsterites, lingered on for a time after the fall of Münster, though by the middle of the sixteenth century these had nearly run their course.

In all these Lower Rhine areas, and during all this time the Mennonites enjoyed much less of religious toleration than did those of the two regions already described. Here they were everywhere outlawed. Some rulers were less cruel than others; and Mennonite liberties varied with the times. Catholics were usually more bitter against them than the Lutherans, and the latter more so than the Reformed.

It was during the time, it will be remembered, when Hermann von Wied, elector of Cologne, attempted to transform the Catholic archbishopric into a Lutheran principality, that Menno Simons found a brief respite here from his wanderings. But with the return of the Catholics to power, persecution again set in and Mennonitism completely disappeared from the archbishopric.

Among the conspicuous victims of the executioner's axe at Cologne was Thomas von Imbroich, a young printer of twenty-five, who gave his life for his faith in 1558. While in the agonies of torture, inflicted by his accusers for the purpose of forcing him to recant, he was encouraged by his wife who was a witness of his suffering, to remain steadfast. Refusing to recant, he was beheaded. The Martyrs' Mirror, in an extended account

of the trial and execution of this man of heroic mould says that "the count would gladly have set him free, but he feared the imperial decree and the displeasure of the bishop." Von Imbroich was an extensive writer. One of his devotional tracts is still printed in the American edition of the *Ausbund*, and for that reason still read by the Amish who use the hymnal. In 1565 fifty-six members of this same congregation were apprehended with their minister, Matthias Cervaes, who was also executed. A decree issued by the ruling authorities in 1578 making Mennonitism a capital offence practically annihilated the church in this region.

Among the other congregations along the Lower Rhine which survived the early impacts of persecution was the one at *Gladbach*, founded sometime before the middle of the sixteenth century, and by 1650 still numbering some five hundred souls. Many of the members here were prominent in the industrial and commercial circles of the city. Persistent persecution, however, on the part of intolerant dukes finally completely scattered the church. Some went to Nijmwegen, others to Crefeld. By 1720 the congregation had practically disappeared.

The *Goch* church was almost as old as the Mennonite movement itself. In 1547, it will be remembered, it was the scene of the conference at which Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and other leaders tried Adam Pastor for anti-trinitarianism. The congregation was small, but remained intact almost up to the close of the nineteenth century.

*Emmerich*, too, on the right bank of the Rhine just a few miles from the Dutch border was the seat of an early congregation dating back to 1534. Tradition has it that when in 1672 the city fell into the hands of the French, Louis XIV, bent on making good Catholics out of his thrifty Mennonite subjects in this region sent a

learned theologian from the Sorbonne to instruct them in the ways of the true faith; but when the King found that the uneducated Mennonite preachers were better versed in the Scriptures than his learned theologians, he gave up the effort as hopeless. In 1740 the congregation consisted of two hundred souls, but it has steadily declined since. The last preacher retired in 1883, after which the small group was served by visiting ministers. By 1912 there were still twelve members here, but without any organized church activities.

The church at *Aachen*, ancient capital of Charlemagne and later rulers of the Holy Roman Empire, and afterwards an imperial city, was founded in 1559 by a group of Dutch refugees. The well-known Hans de Ries lived here for a time. Up to the close of the century the Mennonites were frequently ordered into exile, but were permitted to remain on payment of large sums of ransom money. In 1614 more drastic measures were tried, and the six hundred members then in residence began to trek to more tolerant lands. A few of the more adventurous spirits dared to remain. But the congregation gradually dwindled until by 1800 none were left.

The *Neuwied* community goes back to the liberal rule of Frederick III of Wied when a number of Mennonites settled here from the Upper Rhine country. The congregation still exists with a membership of about half a hundred.

Physical punishment as a means of bringing about religious conformity did not last much beyond the sixteenth century along the Lower Rhine. A more profitable method for compulsion had been discovered by this time by the thrifty rulers of these regions, a method quite generally used against the Jews also—that of extortion. Toleration could be bought with a price. That this was still true as late as the close of the seventeenth century



is shown by the experience of a colony living in the barony of *Rheydt*. This little barony not far from the city of Crefeld, was at that time the possession of the bigoted Catholic elector of the Palatinate, Count Johann Wilhelm, who was especially bitter against the Mennonites in his territory, and had been levying a specie of blackmail against them for some time.

Influenced by the fanatical monks and greedy local officials of the surrounding territory, the count gave his consent to a raid upon a small Mennonite community located here. Suddenly one July morning in the year 1694, while the peaceful community was quietly pursuing its usual routine of daily activities, largely that of spinning and weaving, a mob of armed peasants, led by the baron himself, and several Roman priests, and "Captain of Horse," clothed with authority from the count, suddenly appeared among the unsuspecting villagers, broke into their homes, hastily gathered together such as could not escape, about forty in number, and drove them like cattle—men, women and children—bound and handcuffed, to a nearby castle where they were imprisoned for a time in a vile dungeon. A certain theological doctor speaking for the priests stated the case against these peaceful weavers, namely that they belonged to an

Accursed and damnable faith, that they must renounce it and accept the Catholic religion, or they would all die because they had undoubtedly lived and sojourned a long while under authority of his Electoral Princely Grace of the Palatinate, and as this had now occurred for the first time to his Electoral Princely Grace it was therefore purposed by him to weed out such a damned sect if they would not change their faith.

After some weeks in filthy prisons, and after the loss of much of their property, during which the ecclesiastical authorities tried by various threats and several executions to obtain a recantation of their faith, most of the group,



thanks to the intervention in their behalf of William the king of England, who had known the Dutch Mennonites well before his accession to the English throne, were given their freedom upon the promise of paying a fine of eight thousand thaler, which they were compelled to collect from their brethren in Holland and elsewhere. After their release they were conducted to the frontier and banished with the threat of forfeiture of life and property in case they returned. Most of them found their way to Crefeld.

### Crefeld

The most influential, and historically the most important of all the Mennonite congregations of this region, and today almost the sole survivor, is the one at Crefeld.

*Crefeld*, now a flourishing industrial city along the Lower Rhine, a great silk and textile center, the third largest in Europe, was fortunate during the entire seventeenth century, the century of so much religious intolerance in all the surrounding territory, to be located in the County of Moers, which was the possession of the tolerant House of Orange. The city enjoyed great religious freedom therefore, and became a refuge for the persecuted religious minorities of the surrounding lands.

A Mennonite church had been established here as early as 1600 if not before. One of the first Mennonites known in the city was a Hermann op den Graeff, whose name appears as the Crefeld representative to the Dordrecht meeting of 1632 which drew up the well-known Dordrecht confession of faith, and whose grandsons were among the founders of Germantown in America. The congregation grew continuously throughout the century by the addition of refugees from the surrounding territory, including the group from Rheydt just mentioned.

Of course toleration here, too, was only relative. While the liberal Orange counts seemingly had no prejudices against religious dissenters, the established church did. It was not until 1657 that the Mennonites were granted full rights of open worship, and even then they had to gather at their meeting place on Königstrasse quietly one hour after the meeting time for the Reformed church so as in no way to interfere with the prerogatives of the established institution. In 1679 they were granted the right of citizenship, of which twenty-nine families immediately took advantage. The first meeting house was erected in 1695 on an inconspicuous back street, at that time the city limits, and hidden from public view; and there it stood until it was destroyed in World War II.

In 1702 Crefeld came under the jurisdiction of the first king of Prussia, whose successor, Frederick William I, granted the Mennonites certain privileges, including freedom from military service upon the payment of exemption money to the amount of five hundred thaler. The Reformed clergy, considering these privileges too liberal, laid their complaints before the king, who replied "The Mennonites should not be persecuted, but should be tolerated both for reasons of state and on religious grounds since they are good Christians living peaceably according to the rules of their faith."

The unusual privileges enjoyed by the Crefeld Mennonites were due no doubt not only to the tolerant spirit of the Orange family, but quite as much to the conspicuous role played by many of the former in the industrial growth and civic enterprises of the city. Mennonites have been intimately connected with the inner industrial and economic life of Crefeld for nearly three centuries. In fact it was a Mennonite family—the von der Leyens, Adolf and Heinrich, coming originally as refugees from the duchy of Berg in 1665, who founded the silk and

textile business for which Crefeld has been noted ever since. The institution started at that time has been managed from the beginning by descendants of the founders, and its products are known the world over.

The von der Leyens have always been among Crefeld's most distinguished citizens—captains of industry, burgomasters, civic leaders. One was knighted by the king of Prussia, and the present *Rathaus* was once his castle. Most of them remained true to their Mennonite connections. But the family name is now extinct. During World War I a General von der Leyen fell in battle; and the last member of the Crefeld branch to bear the name, a rich coffee planter of Brazil, died a few years ago.

Among other prominent Mennonite names must be added that of the de Greiff family, one of whom, Cornelius, was honored by the city in 1865 by the erection of a statue to his honor because of liberal contributions to the charitable institutions of the city. Also to be mentioned is the Müller family, originally from the Palatinate, who established a large textile industry in Crefeld. of their Dutch brethren across the boundary line.

Not to be omitted from this list of prominent men are the von Beckeraths, of whom Hermann, born in 1801, was the most distinguished member. As a deputy to the Prussian *Landtag* in 1847 his voice was effectively heard in behalf of religious toleration, although he was no longer in sympathy with the demand for military exemption. In the following year he represented his city in the Frankfurt Parliament. For a short time he served the Prussian Government as Minister of Finance, and later became recognized as the leader of the Liberal party in Prussia. The Beckeraths are still among the influential members of the Crefeld congregation.

The Crefeld Mennonites, as a whole, still play a

leading role in the financial and industrial affairs of the city. The best proof of this statement is their political status. Under the Prussian Constitution, before World War I, it will be remembered, voting rights were based on tax-paying ability. The small group of the wealthy citizens paying one-third of the taxes was entitled to elect one-third of the entire membership of the *Landtag*; the group, much larger than the first, paying the next third of the taxes was entitled to an equal representation; while the great mass of the population paying the lowest third of the taxes was entitled to the final third of the representation. The Mennonites were almost invariably found in the upper group; the other Protestants in the second; and the Catholics in the great mass of the population.

In spite of their high standing in financial and business circles, however, the Mennonites retained to a remarkable degree the ideals of simplicity and practise of industry which have been a cherished tradition among the Mennonites all over Europe for nearly four hundred years. Many years ago one of the wealthy von der Leyens objected to the introduction of a pulpit into their church on the ground that it savored too much of Catholicism.

### **Life in Crefeld Two Hundred Years Ago**

An employee of the big silk mills back in 1760, himself not a Mennonite, though the husband of a Mennonite wife, and not in sympathy with the rigid and austere religious practices of the day, has left an interesting picture of the religious practises among the Crefeld Mennonites of that time. They had no organs in their churches then, he said, nor did they have specially trained ministers. They were exceptionally generous and hospitable, helping every worthy cause both within and without their own congregations; they were frugal, in-

dustrious, and frowned upon all unnecessary luxuries. Their clothes were simple, usually of a somber color, and of a prescribed form. Shoestrings were prescribed instead of buckles; but the young people, this writer suggests, often broke away from these restrictions. The young men even dared to wear their hair in round curls, and to substitute the forbidden and worldly buckle for the old fashioned shoe string, and blue coats instead of black, according to the prevailing fashions; but trousers and vests still had to be black.

The young women, too, began to insist on greater liberty to follow the fashions of the world. Their bonnets assumed more elaborate styles, and were more highly decorated with gay ribbons. Their dresses were of livelier colors and gayer patterns than formerly. These were for workday wear however; on Sundays they still had to appear in brown or black. Finger rings and similar ornamental jewelry were still strictly forbidden.

This was in 1760; by the close of the century most of the old restrictions had been discarded, and a salaried and educated ministry had been inaugurated. Today there are no restrictions on religious practises in the Crefeld church, and few on religious beliefs. The Mennonites here have followed largely the liberal doctrines of their Dutch brethren across the boundary line.

## **World War II and After**

Great changes have taken place in the Crefeld Mennonite Church, the mother church of the Germantown Mennonite church. During the first three decades of the century the congregation was served by Gustav Kraemer. Its pastor since 1937 has been Dirk Cattepoel who was one of the representatives of the German Mennonites at the American Mennonite World Conference of 1948.



Like other German industrial cities, Crefeld suffered severely during World War II. The industries and monuments of culture built up by the Mennonites suffered a similar fate. The church (originally erected in 1696), parsonage, and orphanage on the Königstrasse, were completely destroyed during the air raids. This experience, however, has deepened the religious life and fellowship of the congregation. As in the case of Emden this congregation has in recent years won many non-Mennonites to its fold. Many Mennonite refugees from the east have found comfort and help in this city and congregation. The congregation at Crefeld is the largest German Mennonite congregation. Because of its location so near the Dutch border and because so many of its early members were Dutch it was for a time a member of the A.D.S. In 1949-50 the Mennonite Church on the Königstrasse, which had been destroyed in World War II, was rebuilt.

### **Relation to Dutch Mennonites**

It will thus be seen that all these Mennonite congregations of northwestern Germany remained in close cultural and spiritual relation with their Dutch brethren almost up to the present. The language of the pulpit remained Dutch until far into the nineteenth century. German was not fully introduced into religious worship in Emden until 1889; in Hamburg and Crefeld somewhat earlier. Dutch preachers, too, trained in the Amsterdam Seminary, served the churches almost as long. The religious literature, whether written by their own pastors, or imported from Holland was of Menno Simons' native tongue. It is not strange, therefore, that the Mennonites here should in general follow the religious beliefs and practises of their brethren in Holland. In the matter

of non-resistance, however, as a rule of life they clung to the doctrine and its practise a little more tenaciously and a bit longer than did the Dutch. Back in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the big merchants of Hamburg and other congregations along the sea coast had occasion to make a more practical application of this doctrine than did Mennonites in other regions where military exemption could be secured by the payment of a certain sum of money. Ships owned by Mennonites, contrary to the general practise of the times, carried no guns. A violation of this rule made the owner subject to church discipline—usually excommunication.

Opposition, to war service, however, weakened rapidly during the exciting times of the Napoleonic period. Although the church elders kept up a running protest through the entire first half of the nineteenth century against the various attempts of the ruling authorities to establish universal service without exemptions, the number of the laity, especially among the younger men, to whom the maintenance of the old traditions became a matter of indifference, was constantly growing. When universal service was introduced throughout the North German Confederation in 1867 no serious attempt was made by the Mennonites of this region to secure special exemption in their behalf. The doctrine of non-resistance had become a dead letter.

Of the essentials of early Mennonitism only two have been retained—rejection of the oath, and the practise of adult baptism, both fundamental symbols of a free church; to which may be added also in every day life a commendable emphasis still on the virtues of the simple life.

The Mennonite congregations of northwest Germany suffered very severely during and after World War II. Many lost their homes like their Prussian brethren but

unlike the latter they remained in their communities. Reconstruction is making very slow progress. The congregations again resumed contact with the South German and Dutch Mennonite churches. All these congregations were located in the British zone of occupation.

## THE VISTULA DELTA

Dutch refugees were also the earliest Anabaptists of the Mennonite type to locate in the region of the Vistula Delta, and the Baltic coast to the east in the two Prussias, settling on lay and ecclesiastical estates near *Danzig*, *Elbing*, and *Königsberg* before the middle of the sixteenth century. Dutch Anabaptists of other varieties had located here before, but these latter could hardly be classed as Mennonites.

Here, too, their expert knowledge of dikes and dams served them well, and secured for them the favor of well-satisfied landlords, both Catholic and Lutheran, in spite of religious heresies. Just when the first came and how many is not known for a certainty; but by 1549 they must have been organized into several church congregations, for in that year Menno Simons, who had labored among them for a while, writing from Wismar, addressed the churches in Prussia. Menno was followed by his friend and fellow worker Dirk Philips as a leader among the churches here, who remained in the neighborhood of Danzig until his departure for Emden in 1568.

In 1562, two noblemen, Simon and Hans von Loysen, the owners of large uncultivated estates in the lower delta at Tiegenhof, water-soaked and overgrown with brush, sent the Dutch Mennonites a special invitation to settle upon their waste lands. Here the latter were promised the rights of religious worship by the Polish king, and attractive rental terms by their landlords. At

first they were granted long term leases, from twenty to forty years, on easy terms which were renewed from time to time by successive owners until the Mennonites finally came into complete possession of the lands the first settlers had reclaimed. The settlements spread gradually across the swamp lands of the wide Vistula and Nogat deltas, and up the river until by the close of the century, in addition to those above mentioned, prosperous communities, and flourishing congregations had been established in the region of Marienburg, Schwetz, Graudenz, Culm and as far as Thorn. By 1608 the bishop of Culm complained that the whole delta was overrun by Mennonites.

While the colonists near the coast were mostly of Dutch extraction and perhaps largely from East Friesland, those farther inland near Culm contained a considerable sprinkling of south German and Moravian refugees. In 1711 a small group of Swiss exiles located near Tilsit upon the urgent invitation of King Frederick of Prussia. Before the close of the eighteenth century emigrants from Culm and Thorn had also penetrated up the river into Poland in the general direction of Warsaw where several congregations were established. The earliest colonies were confined for a number of years to the country districts; for foreigners, and especially Mennonite foreigners, although welcomed to unproductive swamps and pest infected wastes, were not wanted in the cities. Some must have found their way into them, unbidden, however.

### **Religious Liberties Curtailed**

In 1555 the citizens of Elbing complained that the Dutch Mennonite laborers were taking the bread out of the mouths of the natives, whereupon the king ordered the former to leave the city; but they did not have to travel far. The large landowners in the nearby Ellerwald

offered them a welcome refuge upon their large estates. Mennonite industry, however, finally won out. In 1585 the same city invited two Mennonite silk merchants, Jost van Kampen and Hans van Keulen, to open a silk shop in the city, and even granted them full rights of citizenship. In Danzig, likewise, Mennonites were barred for a time. In 1552 the Polish king, Sigismund August, declared that only Catholics and Lutherans were to be tolerated within the city walls.

Although the Mennonites of this region with a few exceptions had a common origin, and shared a common cultural history, yet living as they did under four different and separate political divisions, their experiences in the enjoyment of religious and civil liberty were not all identical. The delta congregations were under the rule of the Catholic king of Poland; those about Königsberg and Tilsit under the Lutheran duke and later king of Prussia; Danzig was a Lutheran imperial city, and nominally under Polish domination, yet as a free city, enjoyed a great deal of local autonomy to deal with its own problems as it pleased; Elbing, too, as a former Hanseatic town enjoyed more liberty than did the smaller settlements in the open country. By the close of the eighteenth century, however, all these separate divisions had been united under the king of Prussia. Under the feudal system of landholding which still prevailed here, the local noblemen most of whom in the lower Vistula were of Catholic persuasion also enjoyed more or less of local control over their large estates. This division of political authority accounts for the fact that frequently king, city, feudal lord, Lutheran and Catholic often held conflicting views regarding the policy to be adopted toward the Mennonites, and issued contradictory orders against them, each according to his own interests. In the confusion Mennonites sometimes benefited.



Not that the latter ever enjoyed equal civil or religious privileges with those of the state churches. Toleration, at first, did not extend beyond the right of worship. Anything that might promote the growth of Mennonitism beyond their own immediate circle was strictly prohibited. There was to be no propaganda. Worship must be carried on quietly, without attracting public notice, and in private homes only. Meetinghouses were not allowed until the close of the sixteenth century, and even then they had to be held as private property in the name of some private individual. Public burials, too, were tabooed. Occasionally Mennonites benefited from the rivalries of the state churches, as when in 1612 the Reformed elector, John Sigismund of Brandenburg, became duke of Prussia, he refused to carry out against those of his own faith the restrictions passed by the Lutheran legislature against "Zwinglians, Calvinists and Anabaptists." Mennonites shared the exemptions of the Zwinglians in this case. Usually Catholic ecclesiastical landowners were more tolerant toward Mennonites than Lutheran business men or clericals who had less to gain from the presence of industrious farmers than did the former.

Such popular antagonisms as occasionally manifested themselves against the Mennonites were based perhaps less on religious than upon economic grounds. At first, living in isolated groups on lands hitherto but sparsely populated, they were able to pursue the even tenor of their way without molestation. But growing prosperous in course of time, they aroused the envy of their less thrifty neighbors and fellow townsmen. The fact that they were foreigners did not help them either, and they were slow to adapt themselves to the culture of their adopted country. Segregated in large secluded groups, practising a proscribed religion, maintaining for nearly

two centuries their Dutch language, and keeping in close touch all this time with the culture of the land of their origin, the descendants of the first settlers retained many of the characteristics of a foreign people unto even the fifth and sixth generations.

When the Mennonites of East Prussia in 1579 asked for permission to settle in Königsberg to earn their living there, the reigning duke upon the complaint of the local residents, replied that foreigners had never been permitted to trade in Prussian cities; and besides, an examination of the confession of faith which the Mennonites had submitted for examination, disclosed the fact that the latter did not agree with the Augsburg confession, especially on the matter of baptism and obligations of police duty. Mennonites were consequently denied the right to engage in trade in the city, and those already there were ordered to leave.

Those who benefited from Mennonite thrift, on the other hand, were the most ardent champions of religious tolerance. In 1676, after the low delta regions had suffered heavy losses from high waters and broken dikes, the prince of Pomerellen, speaking before the *Landtag* at Marienburg accused the Mennonites of being the cause of the catastrophe. God is punishing Danzig, "the nest of the Mennonites," he said, for tolerating these people within her jurisdiction. He brought a number of deputies to his way of thinking; and these attempted to force an order for exile through the *Landtag*. The deputy from Marienburg, realizing the economic worth of the Mennonite farmers to the country, spoke in their behalf. "One can easily tell," he said "whether a lazy drunken farmer tills the soil, or a sober industrious Mennonite; rather invite more of them than to drive out those already here." Other deputies from Mennonite communities who shared these views interceded for them with the king, who, by

taking a personal interest in the controversy, succeeded in preventing the execution of this order.

The kings of both Poland and Prussia seemed strangely inconsistent through the centuries in their policies toward the Mennonites. Sometimes one king would grant a charter of liberties only to be repealed by his successor. Occasionally the same king would repeatedly reverse his own decrees. The best explanation no doubt for these inconsistencies is to be found in the fact that under absolutism kings did not need to be consistent, but might safely follow their own caprices. Their policies were usually dictated by whatever interests at the time had influence with them. If the clergy, business interests, or city authorities desired the expulsion of the Mennonites or a curtailment of their privileges, and no other interests interposed, kings often issued the desired orders, to be as readily repealed at the request of other influences. Numerous charters of privilege, as well as orders for exile in both Poland and Prussia, were passed during the two hundred years preceding the reign of Frederick the Great. But these orders were passed merely, it seems, for effect; and never meant to be carried out. Mennonites, frequently paid little attention to them.

By the middle of the seventeenth century, ruling authorities had discovered a better use here, also of thrifty and prosperous Mennonites. Like the Jews, they might be made the source of considerable revenue for both local and royal treasuries. In the year 1642 Willibald von Haxberg, minister to the Polish King Wladislaw IV, persuaded the king that inasmuch as the Mennonites had been the cause of great financial loss, because of competition, no doubt, to the native business men in the cities of the delta, their property ought to be condemned. The king authorized the confiscation, whereupon von Haxberg promised the Mennonites that if they would

raise fifty thousand thaler from the country churches and a small sum from Danzig and Elbing, he would intercede for them before the king and secure a repeal of the order. The Mennonites protested, but under threat of military force, they were compelled to pay. Appealing to both the provincial estates and the king, as a result of this experience they received another charter guaranteeing them against a repetition of similar extortions in the future.

As late as 1750, however, under another king who had evidently forgotten the promises of his predecessors, the merchants of Danzig were able to close Mennonite shops and other places of business. On the side, the latter were given to understand, however, that they might avoid the calamity by the payment of a substantial sum of tribute money. When told by the Mennonites that they were not financially able to meet the demands, the king suggested they turn to their prosperous Dutch brethren for help. But the Dutch Mennonites, usually generous in their support of every worthy cause, refused to be blackmailed by the king in this case. Instead, they persuaded both the city of Amsterdam and the States General to intercede with the Polish king in behalf of fair play for the Danzig church. This appeal may have had some effect; for, although the king remained obstinate and refused for some time to give back to the Mennonites their former commercial rights, yet upon payment of a smaller amount of tribute money gathered together by the Mennonites from their German rather than Dutch brethren, they were permitted to reopen their places of business.

### **Military Exemption**

Opposition to war did not seem to be a serious cause of antagonism before the days of Frederick the Great.

Military exemption, as noted elsewhere, was a usual inducement offered not only to Mennonites but to other groups as well who would settle on sparsely populated or waste lands all over Europe during that period. In times of stress, of course, as in the case of the siege of Danzig by the Swedes in 1734 when Mennonites were set to the task of putting out the fires caused by incendiary shells, every one was forced into some sort of non-combatant service. Frequently, too, Mennonites were forced to furnish substitutes, a privilege open to all others as well. By the middle of the eighteenth century a special exemption tax was commonly levied upon the Mennonites and paid by them for the privileges they enjoyed.

An interesting exception to the general attitude of the Prussian kings toward the Mennonite refusal to serve in the armies was an incident that occurred in East Prussia in 1723 under the eccentric Frederick William I, noted in history, in addition to his other peculiarities, for his partiality for "long fellows," as his giant Potsdam guards were currently known. When in the year above mentioned, the king's recruiting agents in the region of Tilsit spied out some half dozen stalwart young Mennonites as likely candidates for the king's special service, they did not hesitate to use what brutal force was necessary to drag the unwilling recruits to Potsdam. The church elders interceding in behalf of the young men, reminded Frederick William of the special privileges granted them under his predecessors.

The eccentric king released the unwilling guards, but was determined that there should be no repetition of the incident. He ordered all the Mennonites within the Tilsit settlement to leave his kingdom never to return. Most of them left the following year, finding a refuge among their brethren in Polish Prussia. This order did not affect the Mennonites about Königsberg. But sev-



eral years later, in 1732, the same king, after the clergy had brought a serious, though unfounded charge of Socinianism against all the Mennonites, Frederick William was glad to include the city dwellers also in another general order for exile within three months. But the ministers of the king, realizing that the country would lose more than it would gain by the departure of these industrious farmers and artisans, secured a revocation of the order, with certain limitations, however; Mennonites were to remain and return only on condition that they establish textile works within the city, an industry very much desired, and in which the Mennonites were skilled. With the accession of Frederick the Great, a period of greater toleration was inaugurated.

Although divided politically, the Mennonites of the two Prussias had a common cultural background. Like their brethren on the other end of the Baltic they retained the Dutch language in the pulpit for many generations. German was not introduced in Danzig until about the middle of the eighteenth century, and into the country churches somewhat later. The same was true concerning the Mennonites of Prussian background living in Poland.

### **Remain a Pure Dutch Community**

The large, self-sufficing settlements, especially in the Vistula Delta, made it easy for the Mennonites here to maintain and perpetuate their distinctive doctrines and customs. Propaganda, too, being forbidden, they acquired little new blood during the centuries. A study of typical names as late as 1912 indicate that the Prussian Mennonites consisted almost exclusively of the descendants of the first Dutch settlers who came here in the sixteenth century. According to this study there were, among the ten thousand Mennonites of these re-

gions, 369 family names of which the following are the most common: *Penner*, 527; *Wiens*, *Wiensz*, 499; *Dueck*, *Dieck*, *Dyck*, 492; *Claassen*, *Klassen*, 409; *Wiebe*, 434; *Janzen*, *Jantzen*, 292; *Enns*, *Entz*, 275; *Janz*, 254; *Froese*, 254; *Regehr*, *Regier*, 253; *Harder*, 184; *Ewert*, 166; *Pauls*, 163; *Neufeld*, 161; *Fast*, 157; *Franz*, 141; *Friesen*, 140; *Reimer*, 140; *Epp*, 131; *Fieguth*, 120; *Albrecht*, 120; *Nickel*, 118; *Peters*, 107. Nearly one-half of the entire population, it will be seen, is embraced in the first twenty-one names. The other half is spread over the remaining 348 names, the vast majority of which include but one or two isolated families that came into the church since the settlements in Prussia were first made.

The author of this study says further that the entire list may be classified under four groups—

1. The merchants and artisans who first settled in Danzig and Elbing, seemingly coming from the industrial classes of the larger Dutch cities. The following names are of undoubted Dutch origin, and are not found in the country congregations—*van Almonde*, *van Amersfort*, *Bachdach*, *van Beuningen*, *Conwentz*, *van Duehren*, *Dunckel*, *van Dyck*, *Eggerath*, *Engman*, *van Eck*, *Focking*, *van Haegen*, *Hansen*, *van Kampen*, *Kauenhoven*, *Lamberts*, *Momber*, *van Roy*, *Rutenberg*, *van Steen*, *Utesch*, *de Veer*. The sudden disappearance of old as well as the sudden appearance of new family names is due to the fact that especially during the seventeenth century there was a lively migration back and forth between Danzig and Holland.

2. The second group includes families of Flemish congregations in the large delta which were subject to only slight changes from migration. The most common names are: *Claassen*, *Dyck*, *Dieck*, *Enz*, *Epp*, *Harder*, *Neufeld*, *Penner*, *Regehr*, *Regier*, *Reimer*, *van Riesen*,

*Thiessen, Warkentin, Wienz, and Woelke*. All of these are as common today as they were two hundred years ago.

3. The third group of names of the Frisian churches of the Orloffersfeld and Thiensdorf congregations are sharply divided from the other groups. The following are the most common: *Albrecht, Allert, Bestvater, Dau, Dirksen, Froese, Friesen, Funk, Grunau, Harms, Jantzen, Mekelberger, Martens, Nickel, Pauls, Quapp, Quiring, and Unger*.

4. The fourth group is found principally in the upper Vistula congregations: *Adrian, Balzer, Bartel, Ewert, Franz, Goerz, Kopper, Kliever, Kerber, Schroeder, Stobbe, Unrau, Voth*.

An interchange of these four groups was not common until within the past hundred years since which time many families have moved from the country churches into the cities, and the sharp distinction between the Flemish and Frisians have been removed.

Most of the following names are of Slavic origin: *Busenitz, Dellesky, Ratzlaff, Rogalsky, Sawatzky, Schepanski, Suckau, Tetzlaff, Tilitzke, Utesch*. One of the most recent studies of Mennonite family names of the Dutch-Prussian-Russian background is that by Gustav E. Reimer, *Die Familiennamen der westpreussischen Mennoniten*. The German Mennonites are very active in genealogical research. (Information in this field can be obtained from *Mennonitische Forschungsstelle*, (20 b), Göttingen, Calsowstrasse 4, British Zone, Germany).

The Flemish and Frisian as well as other divisions among the Prussian Mennonites kept their groups quite rigidly apart. Even intermarriage was almost impossible, except by being excommunicated by the one group and rebaptized by the other. By the middle of the eighteenth century this relationship was gradually altered.

## Philanthropy and Culture.

Mennonites everywhere have always been most generous in the care of their own poor and sick. They are thoroughly committed to the belief that charity begins at home. And so they never permitted any of their own to become a general charge upon society at large. In each community both in Holland and in the settlements around the Baltic, by the side of the church there was always a home for the aged, and for homeless children, as well as a hospital for the sick. Sometimes several smaller congregations would join together to discharge this obligation. These characteristic charitable institutions have been perpetuated and transplanted since by the descendants of these Prussian Mennonites wherever they have gone—to the steppes of South Russia, the plains of Manitoba and Kansas, and in more recent times to the high plateaus of Mexico, and the wilds of Paraguay.

The Prussian Mennonites were not a literary people. Neither the farmers in the large settlements of the open country nor the business men in the few city congregations showed much taste for literary effort. Some of the books found among the early settlers were the Bieskens Bible, the writings of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, the *Martyrs' Mirror*, and perhaps a stray copy here and there of the *Wandelnde Seele*. Among the native books was a confession of faith and catechism published in 1671 in the German language by Georg Hansen, elder of the Flemish church in Danzig. The Mennonites here, however, cast aside their Dutch inheritance much earlier than did their spiritual brethren and fellow countrymen in northwestern Germany.

An interesting picture of the religious customs prevailing here at the time can be gathered from a series of letters written by Hans van Steen, elder of the Old

Flemish congregation in Danzig, who lived during the latter half of the eighteenth century.

The church buildings of the period, according to van Steen, were constructed of wood, usually with a tile roof, without paint either inside or out. Within, there was no pulpit. Instead, along the side wall, the long side, on a raised platform there stood a row of chairs, the middle one of which, slightly elevated above the rest, was reserved for the speaker of the day. The preacher delivered his lengthy sermon seated, without book or notes, or gesture, and in the Dutch language. Before the end of the century, however, with the introduction of the pulpit, sermons were delivered standing, and from notes, or often read from a book of sermons. Hans van Steen, lamenting the rising tide of worldliness remarked "the beautiful simple practises of Menno Simons are disappearing more and more." Worship was plain and simple in form. Organs were introduced in Neugarten in 1788 and in Danzig in 1806, not, however, without opposition. Others followed later.

The ministry, as in their original home, was still divided into three grades, elders (*Älteste*), ministers (*Vermaaner* in Holland), and deacons (*Armendiener*, sometimes popularly called "*Beutelträger*"). The *Vorsänger* was also an elected official, in for life, and with a dignity just below that of the deacon. The ministry, as a whole, enjoyed the title *der Ehrsame Dienst* (the worthy ministry). All ranks were elected from among the laity, and served without pay and without special preparation. In fact a promise to accept any call to service was one of the vows required of every male candidate for baptism at the time of admission to the church. Serving for life and without pay, the ministers exercised much more influence over their flocks than did their later salaried brethren of the cloth, who for that reason were more at the mercy of their



congregations. The elders especially enjoyed a high degree of power. Although not clothed with quite the "indelible character" with which the Catholics invested their clergy, yet these elders, once elected, held life positions in their congregations, and could not be removed except for gross sin.

Church government was congregational. Frequent conferences were held by the elders from the various congregations, but such resolutions as were adopted on these occasions, had to be accepted before they became binding by the members of each congregation separately. It was perhaps an over-emphasis upon the invalidity of infant baptism that retarded the admission of members to the church until they had reached a minimum age of at least twenty years. None were admitted under that. Often they were thirty or more, and fathers and mothers of growing families. A period of formal catechetical instruction always preceded admission. This postponement of the age limit for entrance into the church, together with the insistence that church membership must square with consistent living was the source no doubt of considerable loss to the membership at large. In the state church everybody belonged—children and sinners.

The Prussian Mennonites at this time still observed closed communion; the different groups, Frisian and Flemish even discriminating against one another. Within each branch only such as were at peace with the Lord and brethren were admitted to the communion table. To find out the spiritual state of all the members special visitors called *Umbitter* visited each family just before communion day in the interests of spiritual harmony.

Discipline was strictly enforced among all the groups. Religion must function in wholesome living. All social obligations had to be rigidly met. Each member must pay his taxes, and tribute money. To refuse to pay the

latter was to make the burden fall the more heavily upon the remainder of the membership, since such taxes were levied in a lump sum upon the membership as a whole. The ministers had much to say in their disciplinary capacities about gambling, dancing, and kindred frivolities. Corporal punishment of servants is also frequently mentioned as a cause for church discipline. In 1745 a group of applicants for baptism in one of the large churches, including several members from prominent families, were refused admission because they appeared in unbecoming clothes which had been imported from Holland—shoes with buckles instead of the traditional strings, neckscarfs, and cuffs on their coats. One had even visited a theatrical shop, the ministers said. These applicants no doubt repented of their vanities in the course of the year, for the next year they were admitted. There was much dispute over the wearing of wigs, too, but when it was found that in Holland even the preachers were wearing them, these articles of adornment could not be kept out of the Danzig church either.

Marriage was a sacred rite, though not a sacrament as among the Catholics. It must be performed on a sacred day, therefore, and in a sacred place—on Sunday and in church, never in a private home. Proposals were carried to the bride from the prospective bridegroom by the above-mentioned *Umbitter*, a kind of an allround handy man, ranking just below the *Vorsänger* and deacon as a permanent church functionary. In a meeting of ministers in Danzig in 1765 one of the elders lamented the fact that the beautiful old custom of sending two men with a marriage proposal to the prospective bride, and the return in two weeks for a final answer, was passing.

Mennonites were not permitted to hold public funerals; nor were funeral sermons common before 1800. In-



Marriage Proposal Among Prussian Mennonites,  
by D. Chodowiecky

stead of a sermon it was still customary for some friend of the deceased to write a poem in commemoration of the latter. This poem set to some well-known melody would be sung at the funeral, and would constitute nearly the whole of the service. Since the verses were long and many, and the melody slow, the time consumed would equal that of an ordinary funeral oration. The

funeral hymn of Hans van Steen, himself, who died in 1781, and which was composed by his friend, Hans Momber, contained twenty-four long stanzas. Funeral notices and wedding invitations, since both occasions were open to the entire membership, were carried from house to house by the *Umbitter*. This practise is still being followed among the conservative Mennonites of Mexico and Paraguay.

Many of the old customs, like the Dutch language, were passing at the close of the eighteenth century, much to the sorrow of faithful old van Steen who saw no good in the new things that were being ushered in on the eve of the French Revolution.

A few words here specifically regarding the Danzig congregation may not be out of order. As already noted, the first settlers in the Danzig region did not locate within the city walls, but had to remain in the outside suburbs and country side. Danzig though a free city yet was politically under the domination of the kings of Poland. Only the recognized state religions were permitted within the city walls. But in course of time Mennonites drifted into the city proper, but were granted only limited rights of worship within their private homes. Both branches of the church were represented in Danzig, the Old Flemish, and the Old Frisian. The Flemish built their first meetinghouse in a back alley within the city walls in 1648; the Frisians a little later.

Both Flemish and Frisians kept in rather close contact with their Dutch brethren for a good many years. In fact a certain wing of the Flemish in The Netherlands came to be known as the Danzig Old Flemish as a result of this connection between the Danziger and the Dutch. Dutch remained the language of the pulpit in Danzig until well toward the close of the eighteenth century. In 1808 the two wings of the church united into one



organization. At its peak in the seventeenth century the Mennonite population in Danzig and environs numbered beyond one thousand. This number had dwindled to about four hundred by the middle of the past century, but has since again about trebled, due largely to a more liberal policy since that time toward admitting outside members, and to migration from the country districts into the city.

### **Under Frederick the Great**

The reign of Frederick the Great, from 1740 to 1786, was in a way a turning point in the history of the Prussian Mennonites. It was during this period and the years immediately following that the different regions in which they lived were united under one political rule. Frederick, being of a liberal turn of mind, granted the greatest freedom of religion to his subjects. One of the earliest acts, after his accession in 1740, was to invite the Mennonites who had been exiled by his predecessor several years before to return to their former homes. In 1744 he granted the Mennonites of Königsberg full rights of citizenship, more than fifty years before similar privileges were enjoyed by those in Danzig under Polish rule. Two years later he suggested to his recruiting agents that they respect the convictions of his Mennonite subjects in the Elbing district in the matter of taking part in war.

It is small wonder, therefore, that, when in 1772, at the time of the first partitioning of Poland, the delta region fell to the lot of Frederick, the Mennonites here were well pleased. In order to express their loyalty to their new king as well as pleasure at his accession, the churches about Marienburg, on the occasion of a royal celebration in that city which the king attended, presented him with an appropriate gift from the products



of their farms—two well-fed oxen ready for the king's table, four hundred pounds of butter, twenty cakes of cheese, together with a large assortment of chickens and ducks.

This gift was evidently meant to be something more than a mere token of appreciation, however, for at the same time the king was handed a petition in which the churches asked for a confirmation of the liberties they had enjoyed under the Polish rulers, including exemption from military service.

Complete religious toleration Frederick was glad to promise; but as to military exemption, that had by this time become another matter. He owed too much to a well-organized army in the expansion of the Prussian kingdom to look with indifference to any shrinking of the supply of available troops. The growing spirit of militarism engendered in middle Europe by the long wars of the eighteenth century boded no good for the peace loving Mennonites. So long as the Mennonite settlements within Frederick's domain had remained small and scattered, the granting of exemption for other equally important service did not materially weaken the military strength of the nation; and Frederick, as already noted, had not been hesitant in providing for the tender consciences of his Mennonite subjects. With the acquisition, however, of the large compact areas within the lowlands of the Vistula, almost solidly filled with a people opposed to the use of military force, the problem took on a different aspect to a king bent on still further expansion of his possessions. With increasing warfare and growing armies, impressment was becoming more necessary, and service more unpopular among the masses. The example of a specially privileged class in the midst of a reluctant people made the task of both the recruiting officers as well as the impressment gangs more difficult.

But Frederick finally decided that money was as essential to a program of conquest as soldiers, and as hard to get, and the Mennonites, because of some peculiar twist in their logic, as already noted, did not draw fine distinctions between direct and indirect service. A fairly satisfactory compromise was temporarily worked out, therefore, in the course of the negotiations during the years immediately succeeding. In 1780, the great Frederick granted the Mennonites a special charter in which they were guaranteed complete religious liberty with equal rights to carry on any kind of business, on condition, however, that they pay the annual sum of five thousand thaler for the support of the military academy at Culm.

In the meantime, an earlier regulation passed by the ministry in 1774, that Mennonites were not to increase by the purchasing of more land except with the consent of the king, was full of troublesome possibilities for the future. Frederick himself evidently did not rigidly enforce this regulation; for during the next three years Mennonite holdings increased by nearly three hundred. But the Lutheran clergy in the region of the Mennonite settlements now also became interested, with the king's recruiting marshals, in the further expansion of these industrious non-conformists; for the support of the state church as well, rested upon a substantial Lutheran landowning population.

These conditions resulted in a new edict issued in 1789 by Frederick's successor, and binding on the two Prussias, in which the same provisions for military exemptions were retained as before, but a more drastic means of preventing the further purchase of lands was stipulated. The further acquisition of land was now denied the Mennonites; nor were any more to be admitted from the outside except in case a prospective settler

had money to the value of two thousand thaler. Such a prospect might locate with the consent of the king's council upon such sparsely settled lands as were suitable to cattle raising and small dairying. All such, however, and their descendants after them, of military age, were to pay a special tax of one thaler to a general hospital fund. These privileges accrued only to simon-pure Mennonites. All children of mixed marriages must be regarded as members of the state churches, and outside of these special concessions.

It was quite evident by this time that both church and state were determined upon stopping the further growth of Mennonitism. Hampered by excessive and unfair taxes, unable to provide new homes for their growing young people, and fearful of the future, with heavy hearts the Mennonites now looked about them for a new asylum where they might be free to exercise their religious convictions without fear of governmental restraint. Those most vitally concerned at first were the landless and the more conscientious.

But where were they to go? America evidently was not given serious consideration at this time. Most providential must have seemed just now in their perplexity the invitation from Catherine II, of Russia, which had been read in one of the Danzig churches in the summer of 1786 urging them to come to southern Russia where they might enjoy all the privileges, religious and civil, and even more than had been denied them in Prussia. Many of them accepted this invitation. During the next half century, about half of the whole delta Mennonite population migrated to the steppes of South Russia. But that story is told in a succeeding chapter.

Of the total Prussian Mennonite population at this time only about one thousand lived in East Prussia; the

remaining twelve thousand in the Vistula and Nogat deltas.

### **During the Napoleonic Wars**

Although it is fair to assume that those who remained after the exodus just described were among the better established of the Mennonite population, and perhaps the more liberal minded on the military question, yet they continued during the troublous years that followed the struggle for their traditional beliefs as valiantly as ever. During the early stages of the Napoleonic wars when the Prussian population seemed to be divided in their allegiance and the patriotic spirit ran low, the Mennonites, though non-resistant, yet remained loyal to their king, and willing to render the fatherland any aid that did not conflict with their convictions. In 1806 when Frederick William and his court, after Jena and Auerstadt, stopped at Graudenz in the course of their flight to Memel, the Mennonites of the neighboring regions gathered together some thirty thousand thaler for their king as an evidence of their loyalty. Abraham Nickel, the deacon of the Schoensee congregation, was commissioned to present the gift. Nickel and his wife met the royal pair, and as the deacon made the offering, his wife at the same time gave the queen a basket of butter to the great delight, so tradition says, of the grand lady.

During the so-called War of Liberation, patriotic fervor revived, and a strong spirit of nationalism swept over the land. When a universal military training law was passed in 1814 without any special consideration for Mennonite scruples, the elders found it a difficult task to maintain the faith against the popular tide or even to curb the military ardor of some of their young people. How difficult it must have been for the young men of the time to stand for their principles in

the face of this tide of patriotism and against the ridicule and taunts of their fellows can perhaps best be appreciated by the conscientious objectors in America who passed through the recent World War. The elders in their appeal to the king for a recognition of their traditional views said, "We will gladly suffer any loss to our property and possessions, and what is much harder, the scorn and derision of our neighbors if only our religious convictions may be spared."

Frederick William promised to observe their old privileges, but at the expense of a substantial tax instead. Just how heavy this tax was is not known except that it was extraordinarily high. During the entire period of the Napoleonic wars the Mennonites paid special tribute above that paid to the Culm academy, a sum it is said, mounting to thousands of dollars.

That the elders still rigidly endeavored to maintain the historic attitude of the church toward war during this period is shown in the case of a certain von Riesen, a member of the Elbing congregation, who, because he volunteered for service and fought at Waterloo, was excommunicated by his elder. After his return, von Riesen sued the elder for damages and won his suit in the local courts. But the other elders all supported their Elbing fellow minister, and appealing the case to the higher courts, secured a reversal of the decision, on the grounds that the plaintiff had no cause for action.

### Revolution of 1848

The Revolution of 1848, followed a few years later by Prussia's first constitution, marked another turning point in the history of Mennonite non-resistance. The Frankfurt Parliament of that year laid down the fundamental principle that religious conviction could not stand in the way of performing one's civic duties. While the



proposed unification attempted at Frankfurt failed to materialize, and this regulation remained merely a pious wish, yet it was indicative of a new danger threatening the traditional peace principles of the Mennonites.

Democracies are much less considerate of conscientious scruples, and have less patience with special privileges granted to minorities than do autocracies. It was always because of their economic worth that Mennonites were granted special privileges by autocratic rulers--in such countries as Prussia, Austria, Russia and in more recent times in such backward states as Mexico and Paraguay. The king of Prussia himself, Frederick William IV, recognized that fact when, in the early fifties, in the course of an interview with some of the Mennonite elders, who had interceded with him in behalf of their ancient privileges, he replied that now, since Prussia had a constitution, questions of special privilege no longer rested with him but rather with the legislature which represented the people.

It was at this time that the last large migration to Russia took place. Between 1853 and 1860 some two hundred and fifty families located a new settlement on the Volga with the promise of military exemption, and other privileges somewhat less liberal than those granted originally to the colonists of South Russia.

Unfortunate, too, for the peace principles of the Vistula Mennonites at this time was the fact that their Mennonite brethren in the other corner of Prussia and the Lower Rhine had about given up their non-resistant faith. It was a Mennonite deputy from Crefeld, it will be remembered, von Beckerath, who opposed in the Frankfurt Parliament the special consideration for Mennonites which had been suggested by a non-Mennonite Prussian deputy from Danzig.

From this time on the special status of the Men-

nonites was increasingly threatened by the growing democracy of the period and the increasing spirit of militarism. In 1861 a Marienburg deputy proposed in the Prussian *Landtag* the repeal of the exemption clause. This again necessitated the sending of a special commission of Mennonite elders to Berlin. During the Danish and Austrian wars of 1864 to 1866 the Mennonite question was forgotten for a few years; but the growing nationalism and militarism following these overwhelmingly successful conflicts did the Mennonite cause no good in the long run. It was during this period that William Mannhardt, a *privat-docent* of the University of Berlin, and son of the Mennonite pastor in Danzig, was commissioned by the churches to draw up a compendium of the historic Mennonite position on the question of war for submission to the authorities at Berlin. The result was the comprehensive treatise now known as *Die Wehrfreiheit der altpreussischen Mennoniten* published in 1863.

### The Cabinet Order of 1868

The end came in 1867 with the founding of the North German Confederation. In that year Bismarck pushed through the Confederation Parliament a new universal military service law with no exemptions. The country churches again sent a committee of five elders to Berlin in the interests of their cause. This committee was granted interviews with most of the ministers, including von Roon, the minister of war, but not with Bismarck; and with both the king and the crown prince. All of these listened to the elders with respect but refused to commit themselves as to future concessions. The crown prince, when told, in the course of an interview, that the Mennonites, if they could not secure some sort of guarantee of their religious liberties, might be forced to migrate en masse to Russia, replied "In that case beware that you

may not repeat the same experience in Russia that you are passing through here, for there everything is still in the making." The crown prince spoke better than he knew. That is just what happened to the Mennonites in Russia a few years later.

The elders returned to their congregations with no further assurances for the future than the suggestion that perhaps the new law might be modified so as to permit those having conscientious scruples to accept some sort of non-combatant service instead of regular duty. On March 3, 1868 these promises were given the force of law through a Cabinet Order according to which all members of the churches then established and their descendants would be granted the privilege of entering hospital, clerical, or other specified lines of non-combatant duty in the army in case they objected to the actual use of arms.

Thus was ended for all the Mennonites of north Germany the long struggle lasting for several centuries to maintain what undoubtedly still remained the most distinctive of all Mennonite doctrines. This struggle, not serious in the beginning, as already suggested, became increasingly so with the rise of the forces of democracy and militant nationalism. Perhaps a contributory factor to the loss of their old status was the growing lukewarmness of some of the Mennonites themselves, especially among the younger element. In Holland and northwest Germany the Mennonites had already, as noted above, forsaken their own non-resistant principles.

The elders, however, in the Prussian churches for the most part, especially in the country, were not inclined to surrender the old faith without further struggle. Refusing to accept even the rather liberal terms of the new Cabinet Order, they further petitioned the authorities, threatened conforming members with excommunication, and urged emigration. But all in vain. The case so far

as the Mennonites were concerned, although the agitation was kept up for some years longer, was ended. The great majority of the young men after this accepted the non-combatant service offered; a few went in for full duty, some of whom were at first excommunicated; a smaller number of those with more tender consciences refused even the terms of the Cabinet Order. For these latter nothing was left but emigration.

As for the elders, Wiebe of the *Fürstenwerder* congregation, when he found that his members would accept the new order of things almost unanimously, resigned his charge and left for Russia. A few years later members of the conservative *Heubuden* congregation and others migrated to America, settling in Kansas and Nebraska.

In the course of time Mennonite young men, entering military training in times of peace, found no logical reason for stepping out of the army in times of war; and so they gradually lost all their anti-war scruples. In the Franco-Prussian war of 1870 many took actual service; and in World War I there were but few who insisted upon their rights under the Cabinet Order of 1868, which it may be noted had been incorporated into the constitution of the empire in 1870. With the loss of their special privileges, of course, the Prussian Mennonites were relieved of the obligation to render tribute for the benefit of the military academy at Culm which they had paid annually up to this time.

### Loss of Old Traditions

With the passing of non-resistance also went other distinctive practises and beliefs which had ever marked the Mennonites as a peculiar people somewhat set apart from the rest of the world—the opposition to marrying outsiders, to open communion, and to an educated and salaried ministry. In the country churches, however,

there were until their recent exile ministers who were elected from among the laity and who served without pay. In some cases the elder was an outsider with special training and serving for remuneration, while his associates in the congregation were elected according to the old method, a custom still common also among some of the descendants of the Prussian Mennonites on the plains of Kansas and Nebraska.

The city churches departed from the old order more readily during this period than did those in the country. The Danzig congregation had no representative on the committee of elders which visited Berlin in the interests of military exemption in 1868, and took no part in the struggle among the elders to secure a modification of the Cabinet Order of that year. The Elbing-Ellerwald congregation which had been made up of both city and country residents, divided into two congregations in 1852 on the basis of city and country dwellers. The questions on which they divided were mixed marriages, an educated ministry, attitude toward military service, religious instruction for children, and the enforcement of a strict discipline. Theologically all the churches of this region were more conservative than are their brethren in either Holland or northwest Germany.

The compact Prussian country churches did not produce as many men of prominence as did the smaller city churches in western Germany along the Dutch border. Among a few others, however, must be mentioned Hermann Sudermann, the German dramatist and novelist, who was the son of a substantial East Prussian Mennonite farmer-brewer. Among the well-known families who have served the Vistula congregations in one capacity or another, the Mannhardts occupy a conspicuous place—Jacob the first salaried minister in Danzig in 1836, founder of the *Mennonitische Blätter* in 1854; his son



William, author of the above-mentioned *Die Wehrfreiheit der altpreussischen Mennoniten* in 1863; and Hermann, the late Danzig pastor.

## After World War I

According to the Treaty of Versailles almost the entire province of West Prussia became Polish territory. The Obernassau, Schönsee, and Montau-Gruppe congregations were located in this region. Two-thirds of all Prussian Mennonites were now located within the limits of the Free City of Danzig which was attached economically to Poland by a customs union. The remaining congregations belonged to East Prussia. Together these congregations formed the Conference of East German Mennonites whose representatives met annually for fellowship and discussion.

The economic life of Germany after World War I, especially in the Free City of Danzig, in East Prussia, and the "Polish Corridor" region, was desperate. Poverty-stricken farmers lost farms that had been in their families for generations. When Hitler came to power he took advantage of this situation, and by claiming he would save the farmers he won many followers. Danzig was soon united with the Reich, but the attempt to reestablish a union with East Prussia by taking the "Polish Corridor" gave the signal for World War II.

## World War II

The first Mennonite casualties were the two congregations, Deutsch-Kasun and Deutsch-Wymisle, near Warsaw, which suffered severely through mistreatment by Polish mobs during the initial stage of the war. The territory in the vicinity of Lemberg, belonging to Poland, was given to Russia with the result that the so-called

Galician Mennonites located there were evacuated to the Warthegau, a part of the former "Polish Corridor."

Even before the collapse of Germany the loss of life among those Prussian Mennonites drafted into the army was great. The Heubuden congregation had between 200-250 members in uniform of which by 1944 approximately 100 had been killed and an equal number were prisoners or missing. After the speedy conquests of the German Army in the west and in the east during the early part of the war the tide turned. By Christmas, 1944, the future looked gloomy for the population in Prussia. Long processions of refugees from the east had been passing through westward for months. The Russian Army had broken into Poland and was approaching the Vistula Delta reaching Elbing by the end of January, 1945.

### **The Tragic End**

The Mennonite families of Elbing and their pastor, Emil Händiges, along with other Mennonite congregations in that vicinity and the German population in general, joined the masses fleeing westward. Many perished through air-raids, tanks, and general confusion. The refugees fled organized and unorganized, under army supervision and without it, on private vehicles, army trucks, trains, and on foot.

In the beginning of March, 1945, it became increasingly clear to the Danzig population that the Russians were at the city gates. The civilian population was mobilized to defend the city, among them the pastor of the Danzig Mennonite church, Erich Göttner, of whom nothing has been heard since. By the end of March, Danzig was taken—a heap of rubble.

All the refugees passed westward. Some were taken

by ships to German cities in the west and Danish cities then under German occupation. Among the 200,000 Germans who were thus stranded in Denmark were some 2,000 Mennonites who lived there behind barbed-wire from 1945-1948, when most of them were taken to west Germany. Others, pursued by the Russian Army, fled to western Germany where most of them reached the British zone. However, many were not so fortunate as to escape the onslaught of the Red Army. The fear of rape and mistreatment, of which neither women nor children were spared, drove many to commit suicide. The following is one illustration from thousands which shows the desperate situation in which some ten million people of eastern Germany found themselves. A woman whose husband was in service hanged her children and herself when the Red Army approached. Someone stepped in and saved her life but it was too late for the children. No one will ever know how many German civilians, including the Mennonites, who did not manage to escape westward, were sent to Siberia for slave labor. Some have returned but most of them likely never will. Of the ten thousand Prussian Mennonites only a few individuals have survived in their homeland. They, too, are deprived of any ownership. The beautiful farms are partly ruined by floods and other devastation and have been taken over by Polish masters. The church buildings are destroyed, dilapidated and neglected, or used for Catholic services or theaters.

### **New Beginning**

A word about the Mennonite congregation in Berlin is in place here. This congregation was founded in 1887, consisting of Mennonite families that had come to Berlin from all parts of Germany, especially Prussia. The con-

gregation, meeting in the Moravian church, had a membership of four hundred at the beginning of World War II.

During the siege of Berlin the church, as well as the property of most members, was destroyed; many perished and others fled. But even in the ruins of Berlin a nucleus of a Mennonite brotherhood survived, which under the leadership of consecrated laymen is continuing to meet for fellowship and spiritual nurture.

In Northern Germany numerous new congregations were organized after World War II and the existing congregations received a large influx of members because of the many Mennonite refugees who came from Eastern Germany. Among the Northern congregations which received considerable influx are Berlin, Hamburg-Altona, Emden, Gronau, Krefeld, and Neuwied. The following new congregations were established: Bergisches Land, Bremen, Espelkamp, Göttingen, Hannover, Kiel, Lübeck, and groups in Schleswig and Westphalia. The problem of caring for the refugees in their spiritual and economic needs proved to be a great challenge to the established Mennonite communities of Western Germany and was mutually beneficial. All conference organizations and particularly the *Hilfswerk der Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennonitengemeinden* shared in this work.

The majority of the once prosperous Prussian Mennonites, who 400 years ago started to drain and cultivate the swamps of the Vistula Delta, had become homeless and shelterless. Some have established new homes in Western Germany and others have migrated to Canada and Uruguay. The first group of nearly 700 reached Uruguay October 27, 1948. Since that time numerous families and individuals have established new homes in Canada. In Germany Prussian Mennonite settlements were established near Neuwied, Backnang, and Enkenbach.

## VI

# THE SOUTH GERMANS

### HABSBURG CROWN LANDS

While the persecutions following the Münster catastrophe of 1535 effectually checked the further growth of Anabaptism within the empire, it did not completely annihilate the movement. For another full century scattered Anabaptist or Mennonite communities succeeded in keeping themselves alive in mountain fastnesses and out-of-the-way places all across South Germany from the upper stretches of the Rhine to the head-waters of the Danube, from Strassburg to Vienna, never venturing far, however, beyond the confines of the German-speaking regions.

During all this time Mennonites were bitterly oppressed here. Men and women were burned at the stake and beheaded, well up to the close of the sixteenth century. Persecution was most severe nearest the seat of Catholic imperial authority, the crown lands of the Habsburgs—the Austrias, Carniola, Carinthia, Salzburg, and especially in the Tyrol. In all these regions the will of the Habsburgs had full sway, and the imperial edict of 1529, with its later confirmations, was executed to the letter.

In Tyrol magistrates and clergy did their utmost to completely uproot every trace of Mennonitism. Imprisonment, galley slavery, and death at the stake were the penalties prescribed for following one's conscience. Often the common people, and occasionally even the jurors



who were forced to pass sentence, as well as the executioners themselves were in sympathy with their victims, and reluctantly carried out their part of the bloody program. In order to encourage the betrayal of those accused of heresy by their neighbors, and especially to thin out the ranks of the more aggressive leaders, an edict was issued at Innsbruck in 1540 promising one hundred gulden for the delivery of a Mennonite minister if alive; fifty if dead; and ten for an ordinary member.

Hoping that the sight of the executioner's block or the funeral pyre might serve as a deterrent to further defection from the faith, executions were usually made public spectacles. But the results were not always as expected. Mennonite martyrs often approached their fate boldly and joyfully, exhorting the sympathetic spectators to a nobler Christian life. The recruits made on these occasions, frequently outnumbered the victims of the executioner's torch. A slight acquaintance with the art of mental processes should have taught the ruling authorities that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church, and that compulsion never changed a man's religious convictions.

Among a long list of victims during the century was Hans Mändl, a Hutterite missionary from Moravia, who had been apprehended in Bavaria in 1560 and brought back to Innsbruck as a prisoner. Here with two companions he was kept the better part of a year in a deep and damp dungeon filled with bats and mice and other vermin. After repeated attempts to turn the pious man from his faith, all three were condemned to a public death, the two companions to be beheaded, but Mändl to be burned at the stake. The jurors in this case, it is said, reluctant to pass judgment upon the victim against their own convictions, were themselves, thrown into prison for declaring that they "could not burden their consciences

with such a case and that they would sooner endure, therefore, any punishment whatsoever."

The three were led to the place of execution together. Mändl, attempting to speak to the assembled crowd, was interrupted by one of the executioners, *Mein Hans, hör doch ein wenig auf*. But the devoted martyr kept on until forced to stop from sheer exhaustion. Because the two companions were of less heroic mold, it was decided to dispose of them first. The second victim, however, as he stepped toward the block suddenly turned about, calling in a ringing voice, "Here I leave wife and child, house and home, life and limb for the sake of the truth and my faith." Courageously facing forward again he laid his head upon the axman's block and was beheaded. Mändl in the meantime, at the close of his exhortation, seeing the heads of his two friends lying near by exclaimed, "My brethren, he who is faithful to the end, wins everything." The executioner then tied his victim to a ladder and threw him alive upon the pile of burning fagots where he was burned to ashes.

Throughout the century, and especially during the latter half, there was constant intercommunication between all the Austrian territories and the Moravian Hutterites by way of the Tyrolean mountain trails. The authorities were vigilant in guarding the passes and bridges along the highways over which travellers made their way back and forth. Moravian missionaries especially were summarily dealt with when caught.

## BAVARIA

Bavaria, next door neighbor to the Habsburg crown lands, and equally devoted to the cause of Catholic domination, was no less persistent in rooting out all traces of Mennonite and other forms of religious dissent. The Passau prisoners of 1537 have already been mentioned.

According to the Hutterite chroniclers, two hundred and thirty-three had sacrificed their lives in Bavaria by 1581. One of the last of the martyrs was Thomas Haan who was cruelly tortured and put to death in Freiburg in 1592.

Moravian missionaries were active here, too, as elsewhere in South Germany. They passed back and forth continually between the regions of the Upper Rhine and Moravia along the Danube and its tributaries throughout the period known as the Golden Age; and were the object of special hatred and vindictive persecution on the part of the ruling authorities. In fact it is doubtful whether the Mennonite movement could have survived through the century in South Germany without the unflagging zeal and undaunted courage of these humble followers of Menno Simons and Jacob Hutter. They braved every danger and endured every hardship to keep the faith alive beyond their own land, and to carry the invitation from their own Moravian households to their distressed and discouraged brethren throughout central Europe, offering to share with them the blessings, material and spiritual, which the Moravians themselves were enjoying in the land of milk and honey. The Hutterites seemingly were the only group of Anabaptists whose missionary zeal survived the Münster collapse, and the persecuting zeal of all the Catholic rulers after that.

The promise of religious liberty and the certainty of material prosperity appealed tremendously to the harassed and oppressed Mennonites, who were being hounded from pillar to post here at this time. Even those with property often were glad to dispose of their possessions, and finding their way to the promised land, to turn over all their money to the Households for their own and the common good.

The invitation was especially attractive to the poverty stricken and unfortunate; for the Hutterites did not dis-

criminate between the poor and the rich; all alike were welcome to share their blessings. An old chronicler, a contemporary, but unsympathetic writer, puts this appeal into the words of an imaginary missionary in Bavaria as follows:

Dear Uncle Liendl or perhaps Aunt Urschel, etc. Come to us in Moravia, the Promised Land, which is ours as a gift of God. There you will fare much better than here. Neither you nor your children need suffer poverty, nor endure hard work. There you will be assured good food, comfortable shelter and clothes, your children training and schooling; you will be freed of all worry. You, Aunt Andl, since you are old, you will not be required to do anything except to spin and rest as you like the live long day. Uncle Thomas will not need to work except what and when he pleases.

Hundreds and perhaps thousands answered this call during the last half of the sixteenth century. The emigration movement ended only when during the Thirty Years' War the persecuting zeal of the Jesuits and the ravages of the invading armies that passed back and forth across Moravia during that period completely broke up the Hutterite Households. With their scattering, Mennonitism, too, disappeared from the rest of middle Europe outside of Switzerland.

In modern Baden, Württemberg, and Hesse Mennonites shared the experiences of their brethren to the east, except that during the latter half of the century, at least, they enjoyed milder treatment than in Bavaria and the Austrias.

## THE PALATINATE

In the Palatinate, too, especially after the reigning counts had exchanged their Catholic religion for the Lutheran or Reformed faith, the Mennonites, though still limited in their religious and civil rights, yet were not hounded to death as in the Catholic countries. Here both

the state and the church relied more on persuasion than on force to bring about religious conformity. Believing that religious dissent was due more to ignorance than to any well-grounded religious convictions, and that in order to win these humble Mennonite peasants and artisans into their fold, it was necessary to have the well-trained theological doctors of the state church to show them the way of the true faith, the state church authorities held frequent disputations throughout the country in the interests of religious uniformity. One of the best known of these occasions was the debate held at Frankenthal in 1571.

### **The Frankenthal Debate**

This discussion lasted for nineteen days. The Elector, Count Frederick III, a Calvinist, and especially eager to win the Mennonites, appeared personally at the opening session, and remained in touch with all the later proceedings through a personal representative. He had given the proposed conference wide publicity. And to encourage a liberal attendance from all the Mennonite settlements both within and without the Palatinate, he promised a safe conduct for fourteen days before and after the meeting, and full religious toleration during the sessions to all who might attend.

In spite of these assurances, however, only fifteen Mennonites appeared, including two Hutterites, a delegate from Austria, and the remainder from other parts of South Germany. None were present from Holland, although representatives from there had been expected.

The questions under discussion were those usually debated on occasions of this sort—the trinity, incarnation, original sin, the ban, community of goods, separation of husband and wife, magistracy, oath, infant baptism and the Lord's Supper. On many of these beliefs the



Mennonites and the Calvinist theologians agreed. On the distinctive Mennonite doctrines regarding the magistracy, oath, and infant baptism they hopelessly differed. Respecting the incarnation, the Mennonites hesitated to express themselves except to say that they did not wholly accept Menno's peculiar views on the subject nor did they understand all the subtle distinctions made by the Calvinist theologians.

In many ways this was an unequal contest. The Mennonite spokesmen were simple workingmen, and although in exact knowledge of the Scriptures they excelled the state-church representatives, they were no theologians. They were not able to clothe their beliefs in theological and philosophical formulas, but had to confine themselves to biblical phraseology. "We are not able to answer your questions," said one of them, "except in the simple language of the Bible. It seems strange to us that you should persist in asking us many questions that are beyond us." The Hutterites took little part in the discussions; even when the question of the community of goods, on which they differed from other Mennonites, was referred to them, they refused to commit themselves. They were present merely as observers.

Of course no one changed his mind as a result of this debate. Rather each side was more confirmed than ever in the righteousness of its own cause. The Elector, sorely disappointed in the meager results obtained by his theologians, could find relief only in calling the Mennonites bad names. *Böse Buben* he called them, a sixteenth century German phrase rather hard to turn into twentieth century English. *Impudent knaves* is perhaps as good a rendering as any.

Reconciliation of rival doctrinal views only, of course, would not have been sufficient to bring the Mennonites

back into the fold of the established church. They still insisted that church membership must be conditioned by righteous living. A state church, they said, from the very nature of the case could not differentiate between saint and sinner. Both alike were entitled to membership. That the ruling authorities recognized this fact is shown by their repeated insistence upon a more consistent religious life among both the lay and official members. Godliness to them, however, was largely a matter of continual church attendance. To this end inducements were offered officials especially who might set a good example in this respect to attend regularly. Church going was to be made easy and respectable. Such churches as had not already provided special seats for the dignitaries were to do so; and the officials on the other hand were forbidden on pain of severe punishment to go on pleasure excursions or visit the taverns during the hours of worship.

Mennonites seemingly were not converted by any of these means. Severer measures were then tried. Oppression was again renewed, and became increasingly burdensome. Many of the victims, as already suggested, found their way to Moravia, but with the scattering of the Hutterite Households this retreat, too, became closed to them, and Mennonitism in the Palatinate died out also. By the close of the Thirty Years' War there were no organized communities left, and but few scattered individual families.

### **Strassburg**

The imperial city of Strassburg remained during the entire sixteenth century, as it had been earlier, the most tolerant of all the southern regions toward Mennonite dissent. It was here, it will be remembered, that many of the Mennonite conferences were held during the cen-

tury, including those of the years 1555 and 1557 where Menno's peculiar views of the incarnation, and his strict interpretation of the ban were practically repudiated.

Another important Strassburg gathering was the conference of 1568 for the purpose of drawing up certain rules of discipline, which was attended by many ministers and elders from all over southern Germany including several who had participated in the discussions of 1557.

The rules drawn up at this meeting for both the ministry and laity must be interpreted in the light of the conditions of the times. This was still, it must be remembered, an age of persecution. Many of the small congregations were bereft of their leaders through persecution. Travelling elders, therefore, were commissioned to ordain ministers wherever necessary, to visit the wives and children of such evangelists as were away on a dangerous mission or perhaps in prison, and to care for the orphans. These overseers were to be provided with all the means necessary for their work.

Because of the extreme hardships following the separation of families when one member was a Mennonite and the other was not, those contemplating marriage were advised to "marry in the Lord." This became a fixed practise of the church, and found its way later into most of the confessions of faith and rules of discipline. Young people before entering into the married state were admonished to do so only with the consent of their parents and the knowledge of the ministers.

It was because Mennonites had no legal standing before the law, perhaps, and because of their non-resistant faith of which their non-Mennonite neighbors took advantage in all contractual relations, that those having money to lend were advised to place it with their own brethren rather than with the world. In case of diffi-

culty in collecting what was due them, they might make use of the courts if necessary but were in no way to resort to extreme compulsion.

Several of these regulations evidently were in the interest of harmonizing conflicting views among the brethren. In the breaking of bread at the communion service, there was to be no fixed rule as to whether the minister was to break the bread for all, or each was to break it for himself. The practise of avoidance, the source of so much dissension among their Dutch brethren just at this time, was to be retained, but it was to be administered in all temperance and humility. Penitents who were to be taken into the church again after confession of wrongdoing, were to be received without kneeling; but this concession was in no way to apply to the practise of kneeling in prayer. The doctrine of the incarnation, also a knotty problem at the time among both the Dutch and south German Mennonites, was to be interpreted according to the simple words of the Bible; and all needless arguments and hairsplitting distinctions were to be avoided.

Brethren should greet one another with the "kiss of the Lord"; others should be saluted with the words "The Lord help you." Tailors and seamstresses were admonished not to depart from the simple customs of the land in the making of their clothes, and were not to follow worldly fashions. Those seeking admission into the church from another group practising adult baptism should be carefully examined as to their faith, and if found truly converted need not submit to rebaptism.

Respect for the ministry was commanded. Fault-finding and slandering was punishable according to the Gospel manner. Those attending divine services were not at liberty to leave the meeting before the close,

though it might last for five or six hours, except for a "Godly reason."

The regulation that those desiring to engage in a big business enterprise must first consult the elders and ministers was a thoroughly reasonable demand if the entire brotherhood was expected to make good any losses to outsiders that such an enterprise might entail. Mennonites were especially anxious that their reputation for business honesty and integrity should be maintained.

The Nimrods among the brethren who had a weakness for catching or shooting game were admonished not to yield to the impulse on penalty of excommunication, except in case of game for which a reward had been offered. In case a brother was set to guard duty in village, field or forest he might hire a substitute, but if he himself served he was not to carry a deadly weapon.

These regulations, first passed in 1568, seemed to be widely followed, and were often confirmed in later years throughout South Germany and elsewhere.

### Swiss Exiles in the Palatinate

Just about as the last traces of Mennonitism were being blotted out of South Germany by the ravages of the Thirty Years' War, a new immigrant movement set in from Switzerland. This was just the time, it will be noted, when a final desperate attempt was being made in both Bern and Zurich to get rid of the troublesome Mennonites forever through wholesale persecution. As for the latter, though not particularly attracted by the war devastated and depopulated lands along the Upper Rhine and Neckar, yet they preferred even these meager prospects to the sure hardships that awaited them in their own native fruitful, though inhospitable fatherland.

Most of the exiles followed the natural course of the Rhine by way of the Vosges Mountains in Alsace to the



fertile, though at the time, desolate valley of the Upper Rhine, in what was known as the Palatinate. As early as 1650 we hear of a small group located on the right side of the river south of Heidelberg. In 1661, fifty of these were arrested near Sinsheim for worshipping secretly in the forests against the law of the land, and fined one hundred thaler by the local authorities. The Elector Karl Ludwig, however, who after a prolonged absence had returned some ten years previous from the English court of his uncle Charles I, where he had gotten his fill of Puritan intolerance, ordered that the Mennonites under his jurisdiction be permitted to worship unmolested, but that they should pay an annual tribute for the privilege. Several years before, in 1654, the same elector had granted a group of Hutterites from Hungary the privilege of establishing a *Bruderhof* near Mannheim with rights quite liberal for that age of intolerance; for none but the three tolerated religions, Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed, were given any recognition by the treaty of Westphalia. Among these concessions were those of citizenship within the city of Mannheim, exemption from judicial, police and military duty; and commercial privileges equal to all other subjects. Religious propaganda, however, was strictly prohibited. These liberal terms were not to be regarded as rights, however, but rather as privileges. The Hutterites were still merely a tolerated people; and the symbol of their bondage was a special tax of fifty florin, paid annually.

By this time Karl Ludwig, the Reformed elector, more tolerant than either his Catholic or Lutheran predecessors had been, and anxious to repopulate his devastated farms and rebuild his ruined cities, was willing to waive religious orthodoxy in his search for thrifty farmers and industrious artisans. Liberal invitations were sent out to the persecuted people of other lands to come to the

Palatinate where religious toleration would be granted them. In 1664 special inducements were offered the Mennonites also, concessions not quite so liberal as those offered the Hutterites earlier, but in the main not particularly burdensome. There was to be freedom of worship, but not in public meetinghouses; nor were more than twenty families to meet at any one time in a given place. No revolutionary nor heretical doctrines were to be taught; religious propaganda among the members of the state church was prohibited. Mennonites, too, must remember that they were but a tolerated people, for they were to pay as protection money an annual tribute of three gulden for the first year, and six after that. Failure to comply with these conditions was punishable by expulsion from the country.

This act of toleration, limited though it was, must have seemed like an act of providence to the Mennonites of Switzerland where just at this time, 1671, another drive was being made by the governments of Bern and Zurich to expel them bag and baggage. According to van Braght the martyrologist, some seven hundred Mennonites were ruthlessly driven out of their homes during the year, nearly all of whom found their way to the Palatinate. Some remained in the Vosges Mountains. From a letter written to the Dutch churches in 1671 asking for help to care for the Swiss refugees we learn that

Our Swiss friends are now coming this way in large parties, so that there have already arrived over two hundred persons, and among them are many old, gray haired people, both men and women, that have reached seventy, eighty, yea ninety years; also a number that are lame and crippled; carrying their bundles on their backs, with their children in their arms, some of good cheer, some with tearful eyes, particularly the old and feeble persons, who now in their great age are compelled to wander about in their misery, and go to strange countries; and many of them have nothing on which to sleep by night, so that I and others with me, have now

for about two weeks had to make it our regular work to provide shelter and other necessities for them.

A little later we are told by the same authority that about six hundred and forty had arrived, and that another hundred were to be expected soon from Alsace.

Most of these refugees finally found a welcome on the estates of noblemen in the fertile Rhine Valley on both sides of the river along the Neckar and south of Heidelberg on the right side, and from Worms to Mannheim and Alzey to Neustadt on the left. Soon their industry and thrift had transformed what had once been a ruined land into a garden of plenty; orchards were replanted, and villages rebuilt. Prosperity returned and few traces of the late war were to be seen in the regions which they occupied.

### War Devastations

Unfortunately this prosperity was of short duration. In 1688 began the so-called *War of the Palatinate* when the command of Louis XIV to "burn up the Palatinate" was almost literally carried out by his lieutenants. The rich fields of the Rhine Valley were again laid waste. Macauley's classic description of this event in spite of that historian's predilection for fine phrases and well balanced sentences at the expense of historical accuracy may not be much overdrawn.

The flames went up from every market place, every country seat within the devoted province. The fields where the corn had been sown were plowed up; the orchards were hewn down. No promise of a harvest was left on the fertile plains near what had been Frankenthal. Not a vine, not an almond tree was to be seen on the slopes of the sunny hills round what had once been Heidelberg.

The Mennonites did not escape this general conflagration. Some two hundred families were driven from

their homes to seek refuge further down the Rhine, and seek help from their brethren in lower Germany and Holland. Most of these returned later to try life all over again in their former homes. Others never did.

Of the fifty odd Mennonite prisoners sent down the Rhine by the Bernese government in 1709 with a view to deportation to America, most of these, as already noted, left the prison boat enroute, and remained among their co-religionists in the Palatinate; as did also some fifty of the refugees exiled from the same place two years later. Three hundred and forty of these latter, it will be remembered, mostly of the Amish wing of the church, continued down the river to Amsterdam and later found homes near Groningen in north Holland. These exiles are described by a contemporary Mennonite writer who had seen them as they entered the Palatinate as a

sturdy folk by nature, who could endure hardships, with long untrimmed beards, with plain clothes, and heavy shoes shod with strong iron nails. They were very zealous in serving God with prayer, reading and other ways. We could speak with them only with difficulty; for they had lived in the mountains of Switzerland far from villages and towns and had little communication with other people.

For the next quarter of a century these Swiss Mennonites in the Palatinate, in spite of wars, cold summers, crop failures, and constant emigration to America must have grown and prospered; for from records preserved in the government archives in Karlsruhe we learn that by 1732 there were six hundred and eighteen families on the two sides of the Upper Rhine, a total population of approximately three thousand. Among the congregations mentioned which still exist may be included *Ibersheim, Sembach, Friedelsheim, Weierhof, Monsheim, Obersülzen, Hasselbach, etc.* All of these were small farm communities, either on noble estates or small villages,

hence the "heims" and "hofs." Several, *Ibersheim* and *Weierhof*, were solidly Mennonite. The latter still is.

In all the numerous wars of the eighteenth century between France and her enemies of central Europe the rich fields of the Palatinate remained an attractive prize for the armies of both sides as they marched back and forth from one country to another. Hans Burghalter of Geroldsheim, for many years the spokesman of the Palatine Mennonites before their brethren in Holland when asking for help, in a letter written in 1746 complained that

for five years the French troops have overrun our land, confiscated our property and oppressed us with heavy burdens. They consoled us by promising that everything would be paid for, but so far not a stuiver has been received. Besides this we were forced to work for them at hard labor for days at a time. After this the English army came, encamping only two hours distant from us for four long weeks, during which we were subjected to the same harsh treatment. After the English left us to establish their headquarters at Weyer, the Austrians encamped twice among us. So you can see what unbearable suffering we had to endure the past summer. Hardly had this great burden been lifted from us than the good Lord permitted another severe punishment to befall us. A contagious disease spread among our cattle, so that many of the brethren have not a single head left. Our poverty is so great that many of us do not know how to help ourselves any longer.

### Religious and Economic Restrictions

But poverty and war were not the only burdens with which the Mennonites were afflicted during the century. To these was added a long period of religious intolerance. Under Karl Ludwig and his immediate successors they had enjoyed a fair degree of religious liberty as we saw. But with the coming into power of a new Catholic line of electors, and after the waste places of the electorate



had again been repeopled, toleration ceased. In fact under these Catholic electors even the rights of the Reformed, who made up by far the largest part of the population, and of the Lutherans, also, were greatly curtailed; for according to the terms of the treaty of 1648 the religion of a country was to be determined by its ruler. Especially intolerant were the electors of the latter part of the century who had fallen under the influence largely of the bigoted order of Jesuits.

The Mennonites, left without any religious rights whatsoever under the above treaty, were marked for special oppression. Throughout the eighteenth century they were forced to pay tribute money for such toleration as they enjoyed. They were denied residence in the cities, they could not engage in trade, nor were their children admitted to apprenticeship in the trade guilds. Even the Jews, then commonly despised throughout Europe, they said, were held in higher esteem than the Mennonites; for the Jews by paying a certain amount of money could engage in trade publicly, a privilege granted Mennonites under no condition.

Beginning with 1717, under Karl Philip, a more determined effort was inaugurated to prevent the further spread of the Mennonite population throughout the Palatinate. First it was ordered that the Mennonites must be limited to two hundred families, which evidently was thought to be the number at the time, though in reality there were many more. Numerous regulations were passed during the century to keep the population within this maximum. The exemption and protection money was doubled. The marriage of young people was made extremely difficult, being permitted only with the consent of the central government. Hans Burghalter, writing to his friend Johannes Deknatel in Amsterdam in 1747, complains that when the head of a family dies it is

difficult for a son to take his place, and the recognition of a new head is made possible only upon the payment of a considerable sum of money. First he must obtain permission of the local bailiff to fill the position, and then he is turned over from one official to another all the way up to the elector himself and then back again to the church officials, all of whom must give their consent, "all the time" Burghalter says, "with their hands in their pockets," which costs both time and money. Often the greater part of a year passes before permission is secured. He fears that if matters can not be remedied there will be "a great falling off in the congregations of the young people."

The acquisition of land was made difficult and uncertain by the revival of an ancient right called *ius retractus* which stipulated that land which had once been in the possession of a member of one of the three tolerated religions, and in the meantime had been bought by a Mennonite, could at any time later again be reclaimed by the original owner upon the payment of the first purchase price. Frequently an industrious Mennonite, who had bought a worthless farm and then by years of toil had improved it and brought it to a high degree of productivity was forced to turn it back at the first price to some envious neighbor of the established religion, with little or no reward for his years of effort.

Growth by propaganda, of course, was strictly out of the question. As late as 1780 two young girls of Amish-Mennonite parentage, who as orphans had been forcibly taken into a Catholic institution where they had been turned into Catholics, but in later years had again of their own free choice joined the church of their parents, were declared by the Catholic section of the Senate of the University of Heidelberg, to whom the case had been submitted for legal opinion, to be worthy of death for having

left the Catholic church for the Mennonite. The Elector, however, commuted the sentence to one year of imprisonment and exile. As for the elder who had baptized them, Hans Nafziger of Essingen, his offence was declared to be even greater than that of the two girls. But his penalty was only a fine of five hundred florin with exile.

As a climax to these religious restrictions upon the living there was added this humiliating treatment of the dead—denial of burial rights in the public cemeteries. In the year above mentioned a Mennonite in Kaiserslautern had been buried in the common burial ground without the knowledge evidently of the local priest, who was absent at the time. At any rate, when the priest heard of the burial, together with the local police, he dug up the body and buried it just outside the cemetery walls in order to show the Mennonites, as one chronicler intimates, what the public thought of those not of the tolerated churches. All this, it will be noted, on the very eve of the French Revolution.

### **American Emigration**

Of course in these economic privations and religious restrictions are to be found the chief source of the continued migration during the eighteenth century from the Palatinate to what was regarded as the "Paradise of Pennsylvania." The economic causes were shared by the Reformed and Lutherans also, but the religious oppression gave the Mennonites added reasons for leaving. Thousands upon thousands of Palatines of all faiths left their native land for America during the century. Of these the Mennonites formed but a very small part; but in proportion to their relative strength at home they greatly exceeded the others in numbers. The immigrant flow continued throughout the century, being broken only by the various European wars of the period, and being

largest just before actual hostilities began, and immediately after they closed. Up to 1727, the Mennonites led the way; after that they were greatly outnumbered by the other groups. All told, during the century, perhaps less than three thousand Palatine Mennonites left for Pennsylvania. By 1800 that happened to be about the Mennonite population also remaining in the home land.

During all this period the Palatine Mennonites, as noted in an earlier chapter, were given liberal support by the Dutch brethren in all their needs. In 1703 a committee, the *Commission for Foreign Needs*, which had been organized in the latter part of the seventeenth century to help the Swiss exiles of that time, was revived for the purpose of helping their poverty-stricken descendants in the Palatinate, as well as their persecuted brethren in Bern. This commission, first organized to relieve distress, in South Germany and Switzerland, refused to sanction the migration movement, and repeatedly warned the Palatine elders to discourage the Pennsylvania fever. But when poverty-stricken Mennonites appeared at Amsterdam or Rotterdam begging to be sent to the land of promise, the commission forgot its warning, and furnished the necessary means. The organization was officially closed in 1732, but continued to function unofficially long after that.

### Toleration Granted

The French Revolution affected the Mennonites of South Germany as it did every one else. The levelling spirit which brushed aside so many of the social and political class distinctions of an earlier day also put an end to religious intolerance. After the Napoleonic wars Mennonites were no longer regarded as merely a tolerated people, subject to the whims and caprices of bigoted

rulers. They were accorded the same rights as those enjoyed by the preferred churches.

### The Ibersheim Conference

But their improved civil and religious status was not due altogether to the more tolerant spirit of their former persecutors, both state and church. The Mennonites, too, had changed. They met their oppressors half way. It was perhaps for the purpose of stemming the rising tide of worldliness among the younger people, and of strengthening the bonds of unity among them that two of the leading elders, Valentin Dahlem of Wiesbaden, and Peter Weber of Neuwied called a conference of the Palatine churches at Ibersheim, near Worms, in 1803. So far as the elders were concerned it was evident that at this meeting they still stood for the old faith and practises. According to the regulations passed, young men who joined the army were to be excommunicated. Mixed marriages were still forbidden, and church discipline was to be encouraged by means of the *Umfrage*. It was customary among the ancient Mennonites and Amish to send out certain church officials just before the observance of communion to inquire of the various members whether they were in sufficient harmony with one another, to observe the communion service in perfect unity. It will be remembered that this was the duty of the *Umbitter* among the Mennonites of Prussia.

Ministers must be selected by lot, and serve without pay. Religion and Godliness were still synonymous terms. Drunkenness, gambling, swearing, the age old vices of mankind, were disciplined, as were theatre attendance and dancing; vanity and pride as shown particularly in dress and everyday conduct was discouraged. The sisters must appear at the communion table with covered heads. Church membership must be based on genuine conver-



sion, and not as in the state church be a matter of mere form; applicants for baptism must pass through a period of thorough instruction, and children could not be admitted under a minimum age of fourteen.

Among the constructive acts of this conference was the commissioning of Valentin Dahlem to draw up a book of formulas for the use of the ministry, a very convenient help especially for uneducated farmer preachers; for it contained formulas for all ceremonial occasions, as well as written prayers for every contingency. It was already difficult to secure needed ministers to carry on the work of the church, and no doubt this book was designed to lighten their burden. It was printed in 1807 and went through several later editions. It was popular everywhere in the South German churches throughout the century, and was not unknown among the later emigrants in America.

Some of the rules above-mentioned, however, were more easily made than enforced. It was difficult to excommunicate the young men whom Napoleon forced against their will into the army. When the left bank of the Rhine fell to France in 1801, Mennonites gained full civil rights, but lost their military exemption. But if they had the money they might hire substitutes. It is said that in the Russian campaign of 1812 nearly every Mennonite family was represented. In Bavaria and other south German states, too, at this time and for some years later substitutes were allowed. The church leaders were strenuous in their endeavors to stem the tide of militarism. At first they petitioned Napoleon for the retention of their ancient privileges; and then failing in this, they encouraged the practise of hiring substitutes. For a time the churches as a whole collected money for all the young men drafted into service. But this method of meeting the situation was not popular with such families as had no sons liable

to service. Finally each family had to look out for itself. The rich and the liberal minded found an easy way out. The poor, and conservative could only emigrate to America. Between 1830 and 1860 there was a continued migration of both the poor and the conscientious, both individuals and groups from all the Mennonite settlements of South Germany, the Palatinate, Bavaria, and Hesse, principally to Ohio, Illinois and Iowa. By 1868 the south German Mennonites who remained had few scruples against military service.

In spite of conference regulations to the contrary, too, men unqualified for the ministry refused to serve when chosen by the lot. To remedy the lack of efficient and willing preachers, some of the more progressive congregations, beginning with Monsheim in 1819, imported trained ministers from the outside, and paid them a salary. Sembach followed in 1823, and Ibersheim in 1843, until most of the congregations were supplied. The first of these new ministers came from the Mennonite communities of North Germany and Holland, but later the native churches were able to supply a number of young men, many of whom had taken a short course of Bible study in a Mission school in Basel.

### **Missions and Schools**

At the same time the churches became interested in the cause of foreign missions, largely through the efforts of the eloquent preaching of an English Baptist from London, who had visited the various congregations and had attended the Spitalhof conference of 1824. Tauchnitz, the famous Leipzig publisher, who had become interested in the south German Mennonites, had also urged the mission cause among them. At this conference it was suggested that each congregation place a mission box beside the charity box near the church door. For a time the

contributions went to an English Baptist society, but later they were diverted to various other organizations as well as to the work of the Dutch Mennonites in the East Indies.

With the coming of an educated ministry there developed also a keener interest in the educational needs of the young people in general. The elementary village schools of the day were not of a high order. Of religious instruction for Mennonite children there was none except such as they received in their homes. Sometimes in a "hof" where the population was solidly Mennonite, or in communities where a sufficient number of Mennonite children were available, an educated pastor might also become the village teacher, or start a private school for the children of his own church.

One such pastor-teacher was Michael Löwenberg, who founded a school at Weierhof in 1848. It was Löwenberg, too, who first saw the need of a training school for the new ministry, if the church was to have an educated leadership. To supply this need he formed an association of fifty men, who in 1867 founded the school since known as the Weierhof *Real- und Erziehungsanstalt*. The original purpose of the institution was never realized, although it has had a continuous growth as an ordinary secondary boarding school. In 1874 at the time of the death of the founder, it had thirty students enrolled and a heavy debt. After passing through several changes it finally assumed, in 1884, the character of a first class *Realschule* with state approval under the capable direction of Dr. Ernst Göbel, who has continued its head until just recently. The school had a number of finely equipped buildings and laboratories. Although no longer a distinctively Mennonite institution it maintained the wholesome religious character of its early days. Of the two hundred and forty students enrolled in 1930, only

twelve were Mennonites, the rest were mostly Protestants with a few Catholics. Dr. Christian Neff of the local Weierhof congregation remained for many years the religious instructor of the Mennonite contingent of the student body. Under National Socialism the school became a state institution and lost its original character completely. After World War II the French used it to quarter their occupation forces.



Christian Neff (1863-1946)

Among other educational and publication ventures of the South Germans was the publishing in 1780, at Pirmasens of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, from the American Ephrata edition of 1748; and a number of hymn books and catechisms new and old during the nineteenth century. In 1869 *Das Gemeindeblatt*, now the official organ of the south German churches, was founded by Ulrich Hege of Baden. Since 1892 there has appeared also the *Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender* full of historical interest and statistical information. The most ambitious and promising literary undertaking in all Mennonite history since the original appearance of the *Martyrs' Mirror* in Holland in 1660, is the *Mennonitisches Lexikon* which, beginning in 1913, was almost completed when the editors, Christian Hege and Christian Neff, passed away during and immediately following World War II. The *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, which is now being translated into English, will remain a monument to German Mennonite scholarship.

### **A Rural People**

The South German Mennonites, have remained from the beginning almost entirely a rural people, devoted to the management of large estates of the nobility or to small farming. For that reason they did not play a conspicuous role in the political and industrial life of their day. The first city church was organized in Kaiserslautern in 1886; a second in Munich in 1892; and several others since. As farmers they were eminently successful, however, and upheld the traditional integrity and high reputation held by Mennonite farmers the world over. In the middle of the eighteenth century, at a time when scientific agriculture was still unknown, David Möllinger of Monsheim, by introducing the principle of rotation of crops on his farm, and use of clovers in place of



following, selective stock breeding, and other improved methods of agriculture now everywhere practised, became known as the father of Palatine agriculture. Möllinger had many worthy followers among the Mennonite farmers of the nineteenth century, foremost of whom was perhaps Christian Dettweiler of Kindesheim.

Although their contribution to the general political life of their times was not conspicuous, yet several Mennonites after the granting of equal civil rights occupied positions of trust in their respective governments. Peter Eymann of Frankenstein was first to serve in the Bavarian Legislature in 1849. He was followed by others in other states. Jacob Finger, a lifelong and loyal member of the Monsheim congregation, served the Grand Duchy of Hesse both in the legislature, and for some years in various positions in the cabinet.

### Religious Leaders

Among the men not already mentioned who served the Mennonite cause itself most effectively since 1830, should be mentioned Jacob Ellenberger, first of the new type of educated ministers to start a private Mennonite school for his congregation at Friedelsheim; Jacob Ellenberger II, a nephew of the above, pastor of numerous congregations in his day—Ibersheim, Eichstock and Friedelsheim—and author of a well-known booklet *Bilder aus dem Pilgerleben*; Johannes Mollenaar (1810-1868) of Dutch birth, but elder for many years at Monsheim, and promoter of conferences, hymnbooks and catechisms and other good causes; and his contemporaries, Johannes Risser of Sembach, and Johannes J. Krehbiel, member of an ancient and influential Weierhof family. Christian Schmutz, elder for many years at Rappenu, who died in 1873, may well be called the last of the old guard; although in the main favorable to all progressive movements of

the new order, he retained to the end his early prejudices against an educated ministry and especially against the missionary enterprise of the liberal Dutch churches. The late minister of Sembach, Matthias Pohl, was interested in historical subjects, and a liberal contributor to all German Mennonite periodicals.

In the meantime the region spoken of here as the Palatinate has undergone numerous political changes since 1648; and a number of small Mennonite colonies, have left the mother churches for other locations in South Germany. And so the various settlements above described now find themselves under the political jurisdiction of a number of different states—Rheinpfalz, Württemberg, Hesse, Baden and old Bavaria.

Among the daughter colonies are several that left the Palatinate, Alsace and Baden for

### OLD BAVARIA

In 1802 King Max Joseph IV, somewhat liberalized by the democratic spirit of the French Revolution, and desirous of finding industrious farmers for his Danubian swamp and brush lands, offered liberal terms of settlement to all prospective colonists. About one hundred Palatine farmers responded to this invitation, including eight Mennonite families, who no doubt were induced to make the change in order to improve their economic condition. These latter located along the Danube near Neuburg. Others followed, and by 1850, they numbered over twenty-five families. By dint of much hard work and at considerable sacrifice, they developed in course of time a number of prosperous farms where before there had been nothing but waste land. Their farm homes they grouped together in a village which they called *Maxweiler*, in honor of their benefactor. In 1832, with the personal support of the reigning king, they built a

combination school- and church-house. But their own poorly taught, private school was not supplied with an efficient and approved government teacher until 1849. In the early fifties nearly the entire congregation migrated to America, locating first in southeastern Iowa, but later on the plains of central Kansas.

In 1818 another settlement called *Eichstock* was begun, some twenty-five miles south of Maxweiler. This congregation, too, which by the middle of the century had increased to some thirty-five families, migrated almost en masse to America with their Maxweiler brethren with whom they had been closely affiliated from the beginning.

About the same time, too, a number of Amish farmers from the Palatinate and Alsace had rented large estates in the general region of Munich and *Donauwörth*. These had little religious affiliation with the Mennonite congregations near by, and maintained for a long time their distinctive Amish customs and practises.

Some time earlier, in the preceding century, a group of Mennonites from Baden had founded a congregation near *Würzburg*.

Many of the early congregations have since disappeared, to be replaced by others in nearby regions, and in several of the large cities of south Bavaria—Munich, Augsburg, Regensburg, and Ingoldstadt.

The Catholic Bavarian kings were quite generous toward these unorthodox, industrious farmers, granting them complete religious liberty. Not quite; while they might build their own church houses, these must be without bell and tower. Nor could the preacher wear the clerical garb, or bear the title *Pfarrer*. That must remain the special privilege of the state clergyman.

## GALICIA AND VOLHYNIA

Galicia, of course, is not a part of South Germany, but the Galician Mennonites are all South Germans. Among the thousands of Germans who answered the call of the Austrian Emperor, Joseph II, at the close of the eighteenth century for industrious colonists to settle his newly acquired Polish territory were twenty-eight Mennonite families, mostly from the Palatinate, though a few may have come from Alsace and other neighboring regions.

These Mennonites located, beginning in 1784, near *Lemberg*. The terms offered by Joseph were quite liberal—free land, a brief period of tax exemption, a temporary loan for stocking their farms, military exemption, and religious liberty. Of course they were all poor or they would not have exchanged their well-established homes in the Palatinate for the uncertainties of a pioneer experiment. Unfortunately the group was not one-minded religiously. Assembled from various sections of the old established communities, they found themselves an unmixable mixture of both Amish and Mennonites, who thus far had not yet learned to live together in religious harmony. The Amish contingent, about ten families, left for Russia before the close of the century, settling down finally in the province of *Volhynia*. Later, in the seventies of the past century, these latter joined the Russian trek to America, locating in Kansas and South Dakota. Those who remained in Galicia prospered, and at the close of the first hundred years had grown to nearly one hundred and fifty families. About this time, in the early eighties of the past century, approximately half of these, the surplus and poorer half, for economic reasons, also migrated to America.

In the matter of military exemptions, Austria was

inclined to follow the example of Prussia. After 1868 Mennonites in Galicia were permitted to accept non-combatant, instead of active service. During World War I about three-fourths of the Mennonite young men in the army were thus engaged. Lemberg, being well within the fighting zone of the eastern front suffered heavily from war ravages.

After World War I the Mennonite population in this region was about six hundred, scattered throughout one hundred villages and estates, miles apart, making anything like close cooperation extremely difficult. Services were held alternately throughout the territory in several different church houses and private homes. For some years, before and after World War I, the congregation (for in spite of its scattered membership and its different meeting places the group forms but one congregation with its center in Lemberg) was served as elder by Heinrich Pauls, a progressive and forward-looking church leader. The last minister was Arnold Bachmann, who with several assistants, looked after the pastoral needs of the widely scattered flock. The language of the pulpit was German, though on funeral occasions where native Poles and Ruthenians were likely to be present, the common language of the land, Polish, was sometimes pressed into service.

As a result of World War II the Galician Mennonites were expelled from Poland and shared the fate of millions of other Germans as refugees. They were scattered in the British and American zones of Germany, in many cases without shelter, food, and work. Sixty-five of them joined the seven hundred and fifty Prussian Mennonites on the *Volendam* and arrived at Montevideo, Uruguay, October 27, 1948. Uruguay thus became the latest country to open its doors to Mennonite pioneers.



## ALSACE-LORRAINE AND FRANCE

The present Mennonite settlements within the regions mentioned in the above titles are also of Swiss origin; and religiously and culturally, even though they have not always lived under the same political jurisdictions, many have enjoyed, up to within recent years, at least, a common heritage, including the German language, with their Swiss and south German brethren, and may as well be treated as a single religious group. Of the early Anabaptist congregations in and about Strassburg it is not likely that many of them survived the persecuting zeal of the sixteenth century. But Swiss refugees from both Bern and Zurich found their way into the secluded valleys of the Vosges Mountains, and especially by invitation of the prince of Rappolstein into the region of St. Marie aux Mines even earlier than into the Palatinate. By 1660 when the Alsatian Mennonites met at Ohnenheim to adopt the conservative Dordrecht confession of faith as the best expression of their doctrinal beliefs, delegates were present from the above-mentioned settlement which had its nucleus at Markirch, and ten other localities along the Rhine, principally between Colmar and Selestat. That these different localities, nearly all villages from which the delegates came, and which lay very close together, represented as many congregations, or even settlements, is of course not likely; although the list of signers included six ministers and seven elders.

Alsace received her share of the Bernese exiles of 1671, as well as those of the early eighteenth century. Van Braght says that in 1672 one hundred of the Swiss immigrants of the year before were still in Alsace. Unfortunately for the Mennonites, a little later this territory fell into the hands of the French king, Louis XIV.

Fearing, no doubt, a further influx of Swiss exiles, and urged on by jealous neighbors and intolerant priests, Louis requested the intendant of Alsace, in 1712, to order all Mennonites out of his new acquisition. Those who obeyed the order left for the duchy of Zweibrücken in the Palatinate, and for the county of Montbéliard, and Lorraine especially in the Saar Valley, neither of the latter two having as yet been politically united with France. Through the intervention of local princes who valued highly the industrious Mennonite renters on their estates, Louis XV, in 1728, modified somewhat the harsh measures of his predecessor, demanding only that the number of Mennonites still in France should not be increased.

### **In the Time of the Revolution**

By the time of the great Revolution both Lorraine and Montbéliard had become incorporated into the French monarchy; but by this time, too, Mennonites had been accorded most of the religious rights of other people. Such religious and civil disabilities as were still in force were shortly removed by the great drive for liberty, fraternity and equality. In 1793 they were even given special consideration for their scruples against war. In an order issued by the Committee of Public Safety which contained among other names that of Robespierre it was recommended that the Mennonites be treated with the same spirit of gentleness which they themselves exercised toward others, and that they be permitted to substitute for regular army service work of a non-combatant nature, or even to be exempt entirely upon the payment of a money equivalent.

Later on under the Napoleonic levies those opposing or desirous of avoiding military service, whether Mennonite or not, were permitted to furnish substitutes, a dif-

ficult alternative especially near the end when almost all the available man power of France had been used up by the long and exhaustive military campaigns. As elsewhere in middle Europe, the Mennonites of France were weaned away from their opposition to war by inability of the poor to hire substitutes, by military training in times of peace, popular pressure against non-participation in a common cause, and the growing nationalism of the period. The more conservative here, too, left for America during the early part of the century. By 1870 there were not many young men who refused service.

The French Mennonites, including those in former Alsace-Lorraine, are practically all of the Amish branch of the church. Jacob Amman who took up his residence in Alsace early in the history of the Amish controversy, if indeed he did not begin it there, seemingly made a clean sweep of the Alsatian church for his cause; and from here, of course, it was later carried by Alsatian immigrants to other parts of France. The Dordrecht confession which had been officially adopted by the Alsations, and perhaps not by all of the Swiss and the Palatines, demanded a rigid observance of the practise of shunning, which formed the chief issue, it will be remembered, of the Reist-Amman controversy. By insisting upon the observance of this practise, of course, Amman was merely asking that the church conform its practise to the accepted and official Dordrecht confession of faith.

### **The Amish**

At this point it may be well to say a few words about the Amish branch of the church; for it will be remembered that this division was carried into all the regions that were settled by the Swiss refugees during the latter part of the seventeenth century and the first of the eighteenth—the Palatinate, the Swiss Jura, Bavaria, Hesse as well

as Alsace and other neighboring French possessions. Both branches of the church were included in the experiences thus far mentioned. That the second generation of Amish were no less inclined to hold themselves aloof from their Mennonite brethren and neighbors, where the two lived in the same regions, than were their fathers, is shown in a letter written in 1742 by Hans Burghalter of Geroldsheim, in the Palatinate to the Dutch relief committee in Rotterdam. Burghalter reports that in the Upper Palatinate many of the "so-called Amisch" desire to go to "Pencelfania." These, he says:

have no fellowship with us at all except when they get into trouble and have need of help, then they come to us, but never at any other time. They even try to belittle us and bring us into disrepute with the authorities. They count themselves the *Fine Manisten*, but at that I think they are pretty coarse. I do not wish to despise or belittle any one though.

It was about this time that many of the Amish migrated to America from all these regions, but especially from the Palatinate, in spite of the discouraging advice of Hans Burghalter and the Dutch committee. All told perhaps about five hundred of them, children included, found their way by the middle of the century to the fertile fields and peaceful red hills of southeastern Pennsylvania.

### Conference at Essingen, 1779

Not much is known about the religious life of the European Amish during this period except such stray facts as have found their way into church conference records and church letters religiously preserved in manuscript and copied from one generation to another by church officials. None of these records ever got into print.

The best known of these periodic conferences was the one held in 1779, at Essingen, near Landau. Nineteen Amish church congregations, and thirty-nine ministers from all the settlements in France and southwestern Germany were represented at the meeting. Among the items under consideration were the adoption of the Strassburg resolutions of 1568, mentioned elsewhere in this chapter, and the doctrines and practises considered of special importance by the Amish since the division of 1693. The "long" confession of faith of thirty-three articles found in the Martyrs' Mirror was specifically recommended as being in harmony with the "word of God," largely no doubt because of its emphasis upon the practise of shunning and foot washing. Extravagance in dress continued to be denounced. Among the worldly fashions especially tabooed were four cornered neck scarfs, high-heeled boots and shoes, shaving, combing the hair and trimming the beard according to the prevailing fashions. The prohibition of smoking and snuffing of tobacco, which was confirmed here, had been referred to in an earlier conference of 1752 as a new practise at that time. Hooks and eyes of course were taken for granted, and needed no further mention.

### **Marriage Customs**

A letter written in 1781 by an Amish bishop at Essingen, Hans Nafziger, to the Amish churches in Holland describes some of the religious practises among the south German brethren at that time. Especially interesting were the wedding customs then prevailing. Marriage must be "in the Lord," and with the consent of the parents and the knowledge of the elders of the church. Some time before the wedding the prospective bridegroom must send the deacon to the home of the bride-to-be for her



answer to his proposal, an answer which both the suitor and the deacon knew beforehand of course would be favorable. The wedding ceremony was preceded by a long drawn-out sermon of several hours, in which sometimes several ministers participated, and consisted largely of a detailed recital of favorite wedding scenes from the Bible, including always the story of Apocryphal Tobias and Sara. Never omitted in the instructions to the bridal pair by the elder was the admonition to follow the example of Tobit and Sara in postponing all conjugal relations until three days after the wedding ceremony. This practice was still in vogue among the Amish of central Illinois as late as the past generation, and perhaps among the Old Order Amish to the present day.

### End of the Amish Division

These original Amish congregations retained their separate religious organization and many of their distinctive religious practises, chief of which were footwashing and the *Meidung* until well toward the beginning of the twentieth century. It was not until the early seventies of the past century that serious suggestions were first made for a union of the two branches of the church where the two existed side by side. Although these first suggestions, which seemingly came from the Mennonite side, were without result, some twenty years later various Amish congregations in South Germany began to affiliate themselves with the Conference of the South German Mennonites; in 1937 the last of the Amish congregations in this area, the *Ixheimer* church in Zweibrücken, joined the *Ernstweiler* Mennonite congregation, thus finally ending a long and bitter division begun by Jacob Amman some two hundred years ago. The French churches being solidly Amish, and forming a separate conference district, had no occasion for any organic union. Today, although,

perhaps, still a bit more conservative in faith and practise than their former German Amish brethren or Mennonites, yet such distinctive religious beliefs and practises as once divided them have largely disappeared. The term Amish as a distinct denominational name has disappeared from among the European Mennonites.

### **As They Appear in the Nineteenth Century**

The French Amish Mennonites made little progress during the nineteenth century. A contemporary writer for a French journal in 1819, himself not a Mennonite, speaks of them as they lived just about the time they began their migration to America as follows:

The entire number of souls may be twelve or fifteen hundred scattered about through German Lotharingia, Alsace and the neighboring Departments. Their principal settlement is at Salm, near the Vosges which they occupy almost exclusively. I do not think that there is a single family living in any of the towns. They are small farmers being found especially as tenants on the estates of noblemen. Through their industry, intelligence, and experience as farmers they have become expert in all lines of agricultural industry. This circumstance as well as their reliability and punctuality in meeting all their financial obligations have made them much sought after by noblemen as farmers on their estates.

They consented with reluctance to carry the tricolor cockade when that was made a duty. When they greet one they take off their hats, but like the Quakers they do not take an oath nor bear arms. When the National Convention attempted to compel them to perform military duty they refused, but suggested that they be permitted to work in the Quartermaster department instead, which was granted them by the Committee of Public Safety. Some of them served in this capacity rather than hire substitutes. To their credit be it said that, unlike many others, they pay their debts, not in worthless assignats, but in good coin. They do not use tobacco, nor play cards. To music they are strangers. They do not go to law. They take care of

their poor and come to the rescue of their members who have financial reverses for which they were not responsible personally. On the whole they are rather illiterate, but honest, temperate, industrious and of good moral character.

### **The French Remnant**

It was about this time, especially from about 1830 to 1860, that there was a heavy emigration of French Mennonites to America. The large Amish congregations in central Illinois and northwestern Ohio are almost of pure Alsatian and Lotharingian origin. In addition to the loss to America there was also a constant migration of individual families from Alsace and Lorraine farther into the interior of France. These latter, farmers and millers, locating on widely separated estates and mills, found it difficult to maintain an organized church life. The insistence also upon maintaining the German language in public worship against a rather hostile French Catholic opinion did not make their task any the easier. The separation of the larger and more compact Alsatian communities from the newer and more isolated French congregations in 1870 only made the existence of the latter still more precarious.

Since 1870 there have been several praiseworthy attempts to quicken the spiritual life and the social ideals of the French section of the church. One of these was the founding of a school in the above year at Etupes, near Montbeliard for the special purpose of teaching the children in the official language of the church, German. The promoter was a certain Isaac Rich who had been a student for a brief period at the Wadsworth, Ohio school then just started. It was here, no doubt, that Rich got both his inspiration and his educational ideals; for he modelled his institution quite largely after that of Wadsworth. The French Mennonites, however, were not greatly interested

in the education of their young people at this time. With the exception of a little help from the Palatinate, and good wishes from America, this educational venture had to be supported at first almost entirely by Rich and his immediate family. Changing his Mennonite school after a few years of struggle into a non-denominational children's home, he soon built up a rather thriving institution, well supported both by Mennonites and non-Mennonites within and without his immediate circle. But unfortunately, the founder could not stand prosperity. The institution came to an inglorious end in 1876, when Rich after a moral lapse, was sentenced by the French government to its penal colony in South America, where he died a few years later, some say in remorse for his sins. It may not be without interest to observe that the three pioneer schools of higher learning in America, Germany and France respectively, Wadsworth, Weierhof or Donnersberg, and Etupes, were all started about the same time 1867, 1868, and 1870.

### **Renewed Life**

After this the French remnant seemingly continued to decline both numerically and spiritually. As late as 1905, Pierre Sommer, one of the leading preachers among the French stated that at that time there were eleven small and scattered congregations near the Swiss border, using the German language for the most part in their services, meeting in their own meetinghouses every two weeks; and another group of seven congregations in French Lorraine, using the French language, so widely scattered that they met for worship only once in every four weeks in private homes. Worship, preacher Sommer stated, was formal, the preachers being uneducated and unpaid. Sermons were dull and frequently a repetition of what the congregation had often heard before. Singing,

confined largely to a few of the older members, was from the old *Ausbund*. Young people were admitted to church after a period of catechetical instruction and memorizing of the Dordrecht confession, which few of them were able to understand.

Among the causes given for this numerical and spiritual decline were those just mentioned, the isolation of the congregations and widely scattered membership in a solidly French Catholic environment, the attempt on the part of the older people to keep up the German language in worship long after the young people had forgotten its use, and in addition the lack of proper school facilities, mixed marriages, and lack of organized church life. The founding of a series of conferences among these French congregations in 1901, and the issuing of a church paper, *Christ Seul*, in the French language in 1906, and a traveling evangelist or field secretary some time later, all these contributed materially toward the awakening of a renewed interest in their common religious enterprise. In 1908 the church organized itself into the *Association des Eglises Evangeliques-Mennonites de Langue Francaise*.

The Alsatian-Lotharingian congregations, on the other hand, after the separation of 1870, speaking the German language, and in closer contact with their more progressive South German brethren, although they made little growth numerically, yet maintained a more vigorous and healthy religious life than did their fellow believers on the French side of the boundary line. They, too, organized themselves into a conference unit in 1897. Until his recent death one of the leaders of these churches was Valentin Pelsy.

### **The French Mennonites Again Reunited**

As a result of the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France in 1918 and the reunion of the two former sep-



arated Mennonite groups, the French language no doubt will be substituted for the former German throughout all these churches, which will again become one ecclesiastical body, to the great advantage of the old French group, but to the loss at the same time of the Alsatian; for with the adoption of the French language, the latter automatically cut themselves off from all the traditional culture and the doctrinal literature of the past which has been German, as well as from the main currents of German Mennonitism of today. The French group is hardly large enough to maintain either a literature or culture of its own.

Today the French Amish-Mennonites, both in the former Alsace-Lorraine as well as in the other Departments, are still in the main a country people though more and more they are drifting into the cities. They are still noted, as they always have been, for their industry and sobriety and for their philanthropy and generosity. Sometimes they are imposed upon. An observation of their kindness to the poor and needy, made some years ago by a local writer is still just as true today. "Homeless beggars and wandering ne'er do wells" says this writer, "knew far and wide the regions where Mennonites lived. These knights of the road always knew that here they would be assured of a warm nook in the stable for the night, and the good housewife, too, was certain not to withhold a bit of hot soup from the hungry stomach." Although the preachers for the most part remain uneducated and unpaid, there are signs that indicate the passing of the old order. Some of the younger ministers are beginning to spend a few months or even years in the nearby Bible schools in Basel and elsewhere in preparation for their religious work. Those without special training for the ministry are nevertheless often men of more than ordinary ability in other lines. Several years ago in the course of a visit to the Colmar church the writer

found one of the young preachers of that congregation to be the superintendent of a large textile mill, and another, ordained that day, the chief government forester of that district. Hooks and eyes, of course, are gone, as are also most of the strict rules of discipline and practises once prevalent among the Amish, save foot washing which is still occasionally practised.

In numbers the whole reunited French church includes a total population of a little more than two thousand souls, about two-thirds of whom live in Alsace and Lorraine, and the remainder farther in the French interior. There is also a small congregation in Luxemburg. Such names as *Roth*, *Lugbill*, *Joder*, *Widmer*, *Schmouker*, *Sommer*, *Lidwiller*, *Moziman*, *Wagler*, *Neuhusser*, *Jordy*, *Pelsy*, *Nafziger*, and *Schertz* indicate the German Swiss origin of the French Mennonites.

### The French Mennonites Today

When, in 1939, the German Army invaded France, the Mennonite communities of Mülhausen, Colmar, Geisberg, Belfort, and at other places suffered severely. Young men were drafted into the French and German armies, many of whom were killed and spent years in prisoner of war camps. During the German occupation the Alsatian population, including the Mennonites, was again united with Germany as it had been from 1871 to World War I. In 1944-45 this territory again became a battle ground, resulting in tremendous losses of life and property. Immediately after this the American Mennonites through the Mennonite Central Committee established contact with the war sufferers among the Alsatian and French Mennonites, assisting them and the French population in general by providing food, clothing, and spiritual nurture. Today the French Mennonites have largely recuperated and are contributing food, money, and labor to the

Mennonite Central Committee relief and refugee program.

Culturally the French Mennonites have undergone radical changes during the last decades. Little of their Amish background can be detected. They have given up the Amish practises of non-conformity, and are becoming more urbanized. In their religious life they have been influenced strongly by an emotional piety which is quite evangelistic and has little in common with their Amish background. They are filled with missionary and evangelistic zeal unknown to them for generations. The German language has largely been replaced by the French. At the fourth Mennonite World Conference in 1948 the French Mennonites were represented by Pierre Widmer and Jean Widmer. Since World War II a new interest has arisen in young people's retreats, Bible study groups, choirs, fanfares, student exchange, nonresistance, and cooperation with the Mennonite Central Committee relief work.

## SUMMARY

A few words should be said here of the Mennonites as a whole in old Germany, for with the exception of a few congregations in old France and one in Galicia the settlements mentioned in the last two chapters were all a part of Germany prior to World War I.

In spite of a common language and common religious traditions the four settlements, northwestern Germany, the Vistula-Nogat delta, the Palatinate and Upper Rhine, and Alsace-Lorraine all formed separate ecclesiastical units and conference districts, with but little religious fellowship one with another. The congregations of the northwest, more or less closely allied with their Dutch brethren, were the most liberal in their doctrines and practises; those of Alsace-Lorraine the most conservative.

The South Germans were never in thorough spiritual accord with their Vistula brethren. The country churches, with their untrained and unsalaried preachers, remained more or less suspicious of the more progressive city congregations under theologically trained leadership. The *Mennonitische Blätter*, the more progressive of the two church periodicals, was widely read in the north while the *Gemeindeblatt* was little known beyond the confines of the southern churches. As late as 1926 an attempt to merge the two papers failed. Although these various groups have formed themselves into conference districts, yet in policy the churches are still strictly congregational.

### The Union of the Mennonites

For the purpose of bringing about a closer cooperation among the different groups several of the more progressive church leaders organized in Berlin in 1886 what became known as the *Vereinigung der Mennonitengemeinden im Deutschen Reich*, modeled largely upon the Dutch A. D. S. The objectives of this union were stated at the first meeting—to provide for travelling evangelists, to encourage worthy students for the ministry, to aid underpaid ministers and to promote the cause of Mennonite literature. This conference has met continually since, and has greatly promoted the cause of a united German Mennonitism. But there are still a number of congregations mostly in the country districts and largely from the conservative Baden-Württemberg conference that have remained outside of the confederation.

The Mennonites of Germany are still pretty largely a country people, although with the general city trend of the population in recent years, several new urban congregations had been founded. In addition to the ancient congregations in Hamburg-Altona, Emden, Crefeld, Danzig, and Elbing, all of them several hundred years old.

among the more recent city congregations founded within the past fifty years were those in the textile city of Grounau, Berlin, Königsberg, Munich, Stuttgart, and Heidelberg. Of these latter, the largest and most important was the congregation in Berlin, organized in 1887 with twelve charter members, but had grown to approximately four hundred souls. These members in Berlin, of course, were not new converts to Mennonitism—that is rather rare among the German Mennonites as among the Americans—but former members of eastern churches for the most part who had migrated to the metropolis for cultural and business reasons.

### **Loss of the Non-resistant Faith**

As already noted, all these groups of Mennonites had deserted their traditional non-resistant doctrines by 1914. Nearly all the young men accepted full military service when the war broke out, although a small number in the more conservative churches in Prussia, Baden, and Alsace took advantage of the provisions of the Cabinet Order of 1868 permitting non-combatant service.

Among the reasons given by the German Mennonites themselves for the passing of their traditional peace doctrines are the following. First, the Cabinet Order of 1868 permitting non-combatant service was limited to the descendants of the old Mennonites only. Such as had entered the church since 1868 from the outside, who were not of the original families did not share this exemption; universal military training, too, in times of peace paved the way for an easy transition to universal service in times of war. Finally not to be forgotten is the fact that the rising tide of nationalism and patriotism that pervaded German national life with increasing force ever since 1870 engulfed Mennonite youth as it did the rest of Germany. For some time before World War I the



South German Conference supported a Soldiers' Commission whose business it was to look after the spiritual interests of the Mennonite young men in the training barracks.

According to the *Mennonitische Blätter* two thousand young Mennonites had gone into service by September 1915, one-fourth of them officers. By that time, too, one hundred and fifteen had fallen in battle, ninety-five had been wounded, and twenty-three had been taken prisoner. Ninety had received the iron cross. The losses were equally heavy during the remainder of the war, but the papers ceased to publish the details. It is estimated that the total number of those who fell during the entire period was about four hundred.

At the Versailles Treaty the German Mennonites lost nearly half their population to Poland, the Free State of Danzig, and France—a separation along national and linguistic lines that made the task of Mennonite unification in middle Europe even more precarious than it had been in the past. Those left in Germany proper, counted up to a scant thirteen thousand.

### **Tired of War**

For a time after World War I when the whole German nation was passing through a period of great despondency and humiliation, the Mennonites seemed temporarily to be in a sympathetic mood toward their traditional views on the question of war and their relation to the state. In a meeting of the Conference of the South German Mennonites in 1923 it was unanimously agreed to petition the German Government requesting that in the proposed act providing for universal military training, proper consideration should be given such as had conscientious scruples against entering the army.

The next year, Dr. Christian Neff, one of the best known and most highly respected leaders among the German Mennonites, summarizing an article on the history of non-resistance among the Mennonites, writing in the *Jugendwarte* says.

the doctrine of non-resistance is and remains a significant religious and ethical problem. Praiseworthy have been the efforts of our churches in solving it, as is well shown in our history. The World War has revived the problem, and laid it afresh on our hearts, and challenged our consciences. May we realize the significance of this question, and above all may our young people consider it earnestly and prayerfully.

Especially among the young people was there a revival of the principle of non-resistance. Leaders among them were Erich Göttner and Theo Glück. In a round-robin letter, in which Mennonite youth of all countries participated, questions pertaining to non-resistance as well as problems confronting the young people during the rise of National Socialism were discussed. Under political pressure this movement was gradually silenced.

## After World War II

The South German Mennonite congregations did not suffer as severely during and after World War II as did those of the Vistula Delta and northwest Germany. Since they are located mostly in rural areas, most of those not actively participating in the war did not experience directly the tragedy that befell those in the larger cities. However, the congregations of the cities of Ludwigs-haven, Heilbronn, Munich, Zweibrücken and others suffered severely.

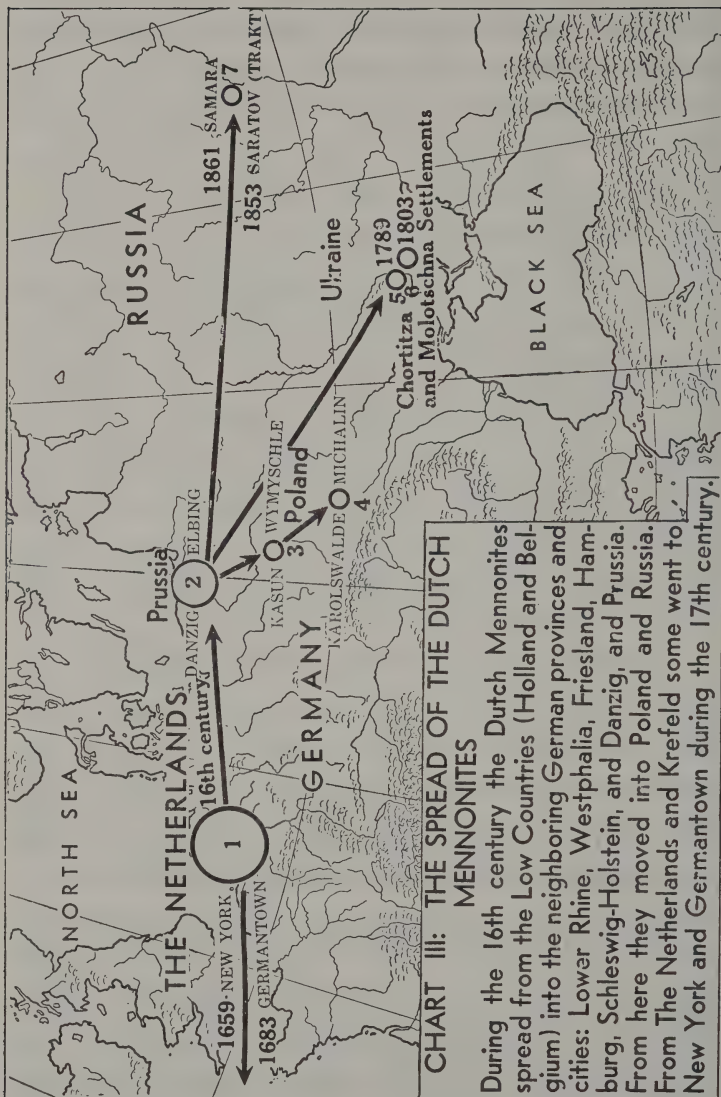
The Mennonite farmers were also spared to some degrees the great food shortage following World War II. They became the oasis where Mennonite refugees from the east found work, shelter, and bread. The South

German Mennonites took an active part in the relief work of the Mennonite Central Committee and conducted such work independently under *Christenpflicht*.

All publications of the Mennonites of Germany were suspended either during the War or upon the collapse of the nation. Only gradually were some of them resumed. In 1948 the publication of the *Gemeindeblatt* was resumed. In 1949 the first issue of the *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* again appeared. A few books were published. The first conference after World War II was held in 1946. Gradually the *Vereinigung der deutschen Mennonitengemeinden*, *Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein*, and other organizations were again revived. The center of activities had been shifted to South Germany. Greatly handicapped were all these activities through the shortage of things related to daily living and, above all, through the seemingly hopeless political and economic situation. Besides, all activities were paralyzed through the division of Germany into the American, French, British, and Russian zones of occupation.

A number of outstanding leaders of the South German Mennonites passed away during and after the war. Among them should be mentioned Christian Neff, who served the Weierhof congregation for more than five decades and was one of the most outstanding German Mennonite conference leaders and scholars, and Christian Hege, another Mennonite scholar and co-editor with Christian Neff of the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*.

The South German Mennonites, being primarily rural, did not suffer as much as their brethren of Northern and Eastern Germany. For this reason they were soon able to help in the reconstruction program. New congregations originated at Enkenbach and Backnang where Mennonite settlements were established. A new congregation was also established in Nürnberg.



### CHART III: THE SPREAD OF THE DUTCH MENNONITES

During the 16th century the Dutch Mennonites spread from the Low Countries (Holland and Belgium) into the neighboring German provinces and cities: Lower Rhine, Westphalia, Friesland, Hamburg, Schleswig-Holstein, and Danzig, and Prussia. From here they moved into Poland and Russia. From The Netherlands and Krefeld some went to New York and Germantown during the 17th century.

The Mennonite congregation of Frankfurt, where the Mennonite Central Committee maintains an office, has increased considerably and is independent since 1948. The headquarters of the *Hilfswerk der Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennonitengemeinden* are located in Ludwigshafen.



## VII

# THE HUTTERITES

The persecuting zeal which drove Jacob Hutter and his humble followers across the Moravian border in 1535 gradually spent itself; and when the local noblemen, whose estates had greatly benefited from the industry and expert farming of the Hutterites, learned that there was no connection whatever between the communism of the Moravian Anabaptists and that of the Münsterites, they refused to carry out the cruel orders of King Ferdinand and Emperor Charles to completely annihilate the movement inaugurated by the Tyrolean hatter. Many of the exiles, of both the Hutterite and other Anabaptist groups, now returned to their former homes. Soon the Households were re-occupied and others built. In a few years it was commonly reported that the number of Anabaptists in *Moravia* was again some four or five thousand, mostly Hutterites scattered about in some twenty Households.

Where the protection of interested landlords was wanting, however, these dissenting groups were never entirely safe from attack. An illustration of what they might expect at any time is found in the experience, in the year 1539, of a small group of the brethren, some hundred and fifty of them, who had established themselves a short distance south of Nikolsburg in Lower Austria. Apparently on no pretence whatever they were suddenly apprehended one early morning by order of the king, and cast into prison in the castle of Falkenstein.

Here they were visited by priests and doctors of theology attempting to convince the prisoners of the errors of their ways; and by representatives of the government attempting to force from them a confession as to the hiding place of their treasures; for all Hutterite communities were reported to be wealthy. "Our treasure is in the Lord Jesus Christ," the brethren replied, "not in worldly possessions." Failing in both these objectives, the authorities released the women, but held the men, some ninety of them, for galley service against the Turks. At Triest, however, on the way to the coast, the prisoners escaped some months later and found their way back to Moravia, all but twelve of them who, recaptured, actually served out their sentence amid great hardship and suffering.

### **During the Smalkald War**

During the Smalkald War which ended with the treaty of Augsburg in 1555, dissenting religious groups throughout the Habsburg possessions entered another period of severe trial. It will be remembered that throughout the lifetime of Luther, Emperor Charles was so preoccupied with political worries, including a series of wars with his chief rival of long standing, the king of France, and also the constant dread of a Turkish invasion on his eastern frontier, that, though a devout Catholic, yet he had little time to spare for the religious questions then agitating his reign. The Lutheran movement, therefore, had a fairly free hand during this period.

With the settling of his political problems, however, and the beginning of the religious wars in 1546, Charles devoted the remaining few years of his troubled reign to making his empire safe for Catholicism. The result was a bitter religious struggle which showed little sympathy

for religious dissent of any sort. Although many of the local landlords were loath to part with their industrious tenants, the Catholic clergy and higher civil officials were not. Both emperor and king were agreed that Anabaptists of every sort must be completely rooted out, not only from Moravia, but from all the Habsburg possessions as well. Upon imperial request the Moravian *Landtag* ordered all Hutterites as well as other dissenting groups to immediately renounce their faith or go into exile. Most of the former crossed the frontier into northwestern Hungary, where they established a new settlement at Sobotiste, to which was added later in the century, Levar, and other communities near by in the foothills on the eastern slopes of the Little Carpathians, a region usually spoken of by later chroniclers as Upper Hungary.

In vain the persecuted Moravian brethren plead for mercy, or at least time in which to dispose of their property before leaving. They were not a menace to the country, they said, as reported; for they were less than two thousand in number in all Moravia, living in twenty-one Households. But in Hungary, too, the exiles were as unwelcome as they had been in Moravia. Pressed by King Ferdinand, the local nobility ordered them back. Some, returning, escaped the clutches of their persecutors. But most of them, tolerated on neither side of the boundary line, spent their next five or six years wandering about in the highlands, finding temporary refuge in forests and waste places, hiding in caves, seeking shelter amid the rocks, finding food and clothing as best they could. "Gladly", says a chronicler of the time, "would they have shared a roof with the cattle and swine, but even that was denied them." No one dared, under severe penalty, give them relief, sell them food and clothing, or furnish them with work. Their men, women and children were declared outlaws, with every-

thing that that word implies, giving robbers and ruffians the right to attack them wantonly and with impunity; rob them of their goods, ravage their women folk, and attack their men—an opportunity which the lawless elements of the region were not slow to seize.

### The Golden Age

But a better day was ahead. The treaty of Augsburg, in 1555, which inaugurated a degree of tolerance by transferring from the emperor to the local rulers the right to prescribe the religious faith of the people, and the end of the reign of the bigoted Charles which came about the same time, marked a turning point in the history of religious liberty. The Hutterites, though not one of the tolerated parties officially recognized by the Augsburg agreement, yet in a measure shared with all non-Catholics the religious privileges of the period. There began now for these persecuted people a period called the "Golden Age" in the book of chronicles, which continued throughout the greater part of the century.

The church grew in numbers and in material prosperity. At its peak it is estimated that the population reached approximately fifteen thousand, living in Moravia and Upper Hungary, and distributed throughout some fifty Households. During all this period the prosperous Hutterite communities made a strong appeal to the less fortunate Anabaptists of other countries as the "Promised Land." A steady stream of emigrant refugees from Switzerland and South Germany kept passing in and out of Moravia, and much of the growth of the native church is to be ascribed to this migration.

The Moravian brethren, too, were ardent missionaries, desiring to share both their material and spiritual

blessings with others. To this end, throughout this period, they continued to send out missionaries to other lands inviting the persecuted everywhere to come to Moravia. This was a dangerous undertaking for the missionaries; for Anabaptists were still outlawed everywhere else in Europe. The records of the time are full of the names of devoted men and women who risked their all to carry the good news throughout middle Europe, most of whom never came back. A few casual examples taken from the chroniclers of the time must suffice here as illustrations of what these devoted and courageous messengers of a new religious faith and a new social order had to suffer in behalf of their convictions.

In 1558, Hans Raiffer, a smith by trade and a minister, was apprehended on his way to The Netherlands. After being put through the most cruel torture on the rack in the hope of turning him from his faith, he was tied to a stake with a rope about his neck, and a chain around his limbs, and in this position burned to a crisp. The executioners explained that they were reluctant to carry out these orders, but if they did not the new emperor would punish them. In the year 1556, a minister was drowned at Venice, and another executed with the sword at Innsbruck. In 1571 Wolf Binder was arrested in Bavaria, and stretched on the rack until it seemed that "the sun would shine through him." Refusing to forsake his faith, he was released from this cruel instrument of torture, and with a song of his own composition on his lips was mercifully beheaded. By the close of the century, no doubt, hundreds of these brave men and women had given their all to promote what they believed to be their divine commission. As late as 1618, the chroniclers record the imprisonment, torture, and final execution in Tyrol of Jost Wilhelm, a well-to-do Moravian missionary.



## Religious Practises

As has already been suggested, the Hutterites agreed with the peaceful Anabaptists elsewhere later known as Mennonites in all the essential Anabaptist doctrines, such as adult baptism, rejection of the oath, non-resistance, opposition to office holding, the memorial theory of the Lord's Supper and other characteristic principles and practises. For a time, especially during periods of special stress, they were in rather close touch with the Mennonites of Switzerland and South Germany, and occasionally with those in Holland. They frequently attended Mennonite conferences, being represented at the Strassburg meeting, in 1557, where Menno Simons' Wismar rules were discussed. Although they never bore the name Mennonite, yet they must be included in any complete history of that body of believers.

In their later years they were more consistent followers of certain early characteristic Mennonite doctrines than the Mennonites themselves. They agreed strictly with Menno Simons, and with Jacob Amman of a later date, in the rigid application of the practise of avoidance to all excommunicated members, a very effective disciplinary weapon, especially in a communistic society where not only spiritual fellowship was denied the unfortunate victim of ostracism but where even his bread and butter might be at stake. In their practise of non-resistance too, the Hutterites were more consistent than their Mennonite brethren in the rest of Europe. Their cutlers in the community workshops were not permitted to make any weapons of warfare, only knives and cutlery that could be used for peace purposes. Nor did they manufacture gunpowder, a business engaged in occasionally with great material gain by the Mennonites of both Holland and Prussia, who also claimed non-resist-

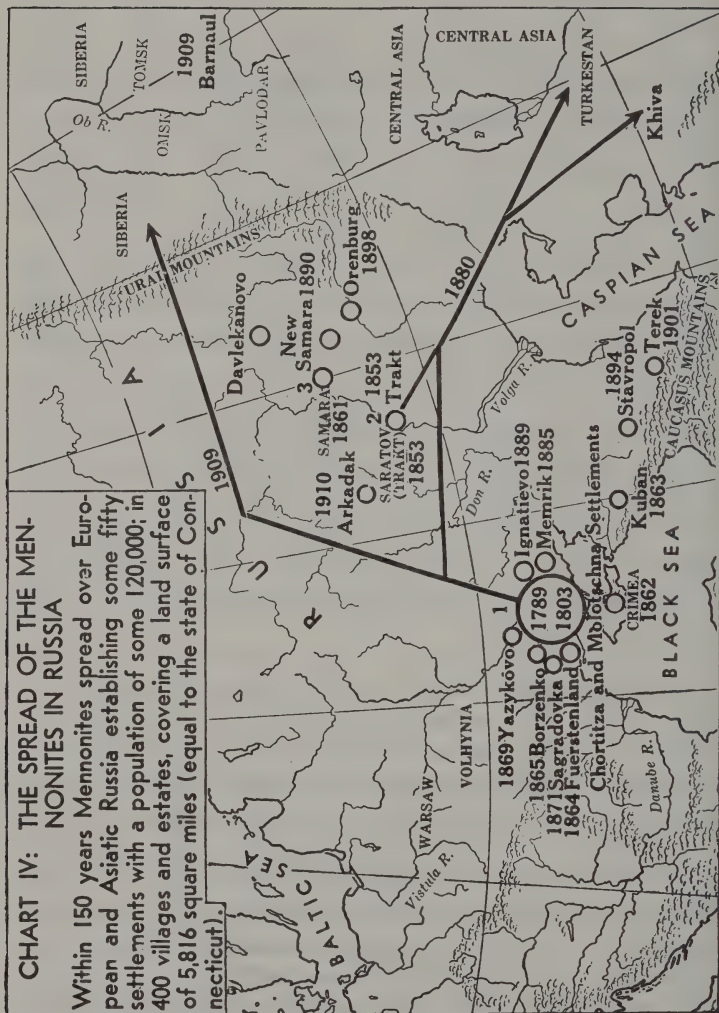
ance and opposition to war as one of their principal religious tenets. Nor would they pay war tax. "Blood Money" they called it. The Swiss Brethren in Moravia at this time, Anabaptist immigrants who refused to accept the communal life of the Hutterites, had no such scruples, and drew no such fine distinctions in aiding the practise of war by this indirect method.

In one important matter, however, the Hutterites were unique, and different from the Mennonite group. They had all things in common, working together for a common fund, living under a common roof, and eating at a common table, a number of families in a group called a Household. When a new member joined their company he turned all his private property into the common treasury; and when he left, in case that happened, it was not returned. Their communism, unlike most later similar social experiments, rested not upon an economic, but a religious basis. The sharing of material as well as spiritual blessings was as much a part of their religious faith, and as binding a divine command as any other part of their doctrinal system. It is to this religious sanction undoubtedly that one must turn for an explanation for the continued success, lasting now for four centuries, of this social utopia, while nearly all other similar attempts, based on economic considerations only, have lamentably failed. A deep religious conviction, after all, seemingly is the strongest of social forces. Peter Riedemann's *Rechenschaft*, the official confession of faith of the brethren, written before the middle of the sixteenth century, justifies the practise with copious scriptural quotations not only from the New and Old Testaments, but from the Apocrypha as well. Communism to the Hutterites was not only a convenient form of social organization; it was their religion. Rather than give up the practise, says one of their chroniclers, they would die for it; and many did.

## *The Bruderhof*

The *Bruderhof*, as each of their colonies or "Households" was called, was a self-sufficient economic as well as social and religious unit, consisting of from twenty to fifty or more families, all living under the roof of one or more communal houses. Land in Moravia, as elsewhere in Europe at that time, was held by feudal tenure, in the hands of great landlords. The Households were established under certain stipulations, including frequently agreements to furnish labor at a specified price, or some other useful service, as well as a share of the products of the land. In turn the local landlord, if he was an influential person, would guarantee protection against religious persecution. Since the Hutterites were an industrious people, often well skilled in all sorts of craftsmanship, they were usually in demand by the feudal lords as tenants. For sobriety, skill, industry and reliability, rare virtues in those turbulent times, there were few stewards of estates, millers, and superintendents of vineyards, better than they.

In government each *Bruderhof* was a complete economic unit. For religious control several might unite under one bishop, but each had a "minister of the word" to minister to their spiritual needs. By his side there was in each unit a "minister of needs," democratically elected by all the male church members, who had almost arbitrary control of the daily economic life of the community. He handled all the money, distributed the work to be done by the various members, made all the necessary purchases, sold the crops, looked after the sale of the manufactured products, represented the business affairs of the community with the outside world—in fact he, together with his assistants, was the business dictator of the community with practically unlimited powers



except such powers as he shared with the church elders, as when new land was to be purchased, or new buildings were to be erected.

Of course there was no private ownership of any sort within the *Bruderhof*. No one owned anything of his own except the clothes on his back, and perhaps an heirloom or two; but even these latter reverted back to the community as a whole upon the death of the erstwhile owner. All ate at a common table and from common dishes and utensils. Unmarried boys and girls lived in separate dormitories. Only married folks enjoyed a room to themselves with the bare necessary furniture. But even this was for sleeping purposes only and not to be regarded as a private home. All the money made on the side, such as personal tips and pay for extra labor, had to be turned over to the common treasury, upon penalty of severe church censure if the regulation was violated. Every detail of daily living was minutely prescribed like that of a medieval monastery. The time to rise, and retire; when to eat; how much meat to eat, and when; what kind of clothes to wear, their color and cut; when to bathe, and how to pray.

Since each *Bruderhof* was a self-sufficing economic unit, every occupation known to medieval agriculture and industry was practised among the Hutterites. Besides farming, which was their major occupation, the following artisans were frequently found among them—masons, blacksmiths, sickle smiths, dyers, shoemakers, furriers, wheel-wrights, saddlers, cutlers, watchmakers, tailors, weavers, glass and rope makers, brewers, etc. Since milling was an important industry among them, they frequently located their buildings along a stream which furnished water power, a practise which their descendants perpetuated more than three centuries later along the James River in South Dakota. Being industrious and



thrifty, they produced more than they consumed. "Beehives" their Households were often called. Their surplus goods they sold in the open market, and their personal services often to neighboring noblemen. They excelled especially in fine stockraising. From their stables came the finest horses, and cattle in the land; while their cutlery, woolens and linens, could not be surpassed anywhere for quality. For both their services and goods there was a ready demand. Their public baths were frequented by the nobility of the region. Their doctors, in that day of simple remedies and medical ignorance, were among the most skilled. A chronicle of the year 1581 says "In this year emperor Rudolf sent for our doctor George Zobel. Through the grace of God he was again restored to health."

Realizing that their unusual communal life marked them as a peculiar people, and lined them up with the various radical peasant movements of that day in the minds of their neighbors, the Hutterites were especially concerned about their good name among their fellow countrymen not of their faith. To this end the leaders insisted that their members live exemplary lives, and give their neighbors no opportunity for charging them with the vices usually ascribed to collectivism.

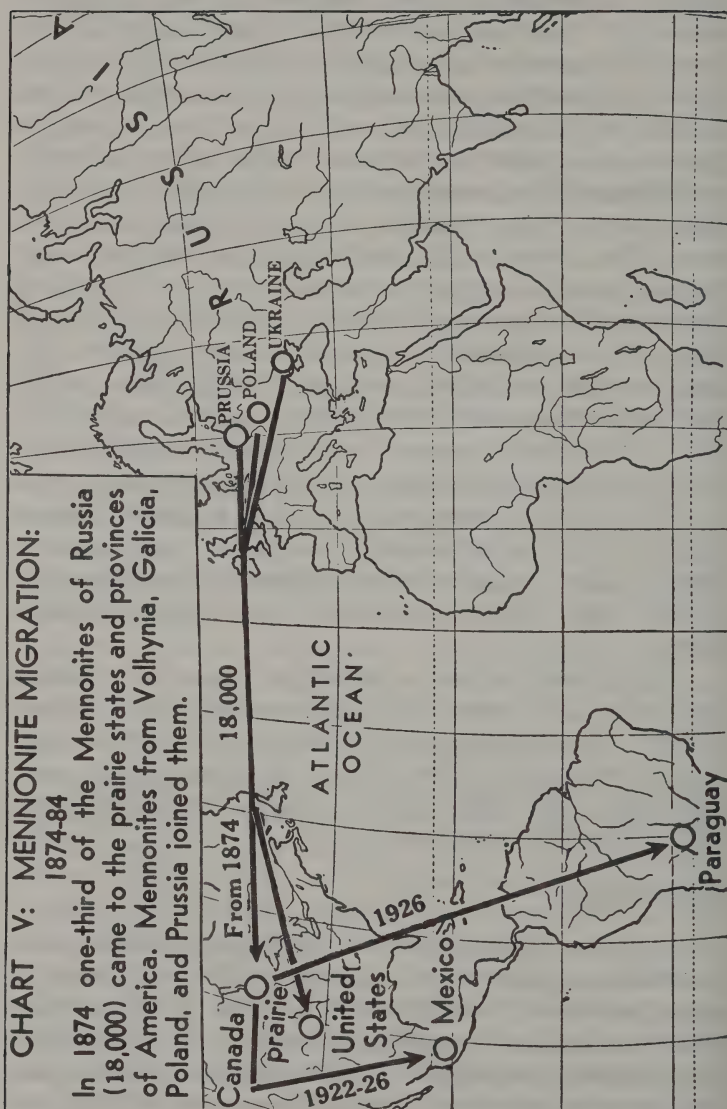
Great care was exercised that the material that went into the making of their goods should be of the very best quality, and all services rendered should be the most efficient. Codes were drawn up for every industry and occupation prescribing in detail the high standards they had set for themselves in all their efforts to make honest goods and please their patrons. At a meeting in Sobotiste in 1654, of the "bath attendants" and the doctors, who seemingly were as closely affiliated here, and perhaps more logically so than were the doctors and the barbers of a later date, a number of rules were laid down to

guide the profession in its conduct, and to increase its efficiency. The "bath attendants" should remember that they were serving their calling for their own soul's salvation and for the common good; they should so conduct themselves, therefore, that they might bring credit to the community and the brethren. Especially should they be diligent in the reading of the Scriptures, and in the books of medicine; also be careful to gather herbs and roots. The advice to go to bed early, and rise upon waking was perhaps as good for others as for the doctors; as was also the suggestion that they should not gad about either in the Household or outside indulging in idle gossip; nor were they to frequent the drinking houses which surrounded them on all sides. They were to be friendly to all, discriminate against no one, and bring all their fees to the common treasury. From the brethren no fees or gifts were to be accepted for services rendered. Neither doctors nor attendants were to make their own appointments. They should also be diligent in teaching novitiates so that their art might not be lost to the brotherhood.

It was this meticulous regard for honest and efficient performance of every duty that created such a strong demand even among the local nobility for Hutterite service of every sort. Not only, as we have already seen, were their baths and doctors in great repute everywhere, but their midwives as well.

### Religious Life

Like the Mennonites, the Hutterites believed that true religion ought to be more than merely a system of orthodox beliefs; that it should function in right living. Much was made, therefore, of leading an upright life. Occupations that offered special temptations to human frailties were tabooed. Visiting taverns was strictly for-



bidden the members, because of the "ungodly activities" usually associated with the life there. Wine might be offered visitors in the home, but never for money.

In their attitude toward business activities they held the prevailing economic theories common to the Christians of that day,—namely, that money as such was non-productive, and that buying and selling, therefore, was a species of gambling, neither religiously permissible nor economically sound. Merchandising consequently was left to the Jews who had no such conscientious scruples against the making of profits. Goods might be bought in the outside markets by the *Bruderhof*, but for use only, not for resale. In all their private and business life the Hutterites demanded the strictest adherence to just and fair dealing, and to pure living. Even their enemies in their best moments could not forbear giving them a clean slate for upright living. A contemporary Catholic writer, who had no sympathy whatever for their religious views or social practises, nevertheless, after a visit to a *Bruderhof* in Upper Hungary in the late seventeenth century says that he saw among them

no anger, envy, passion or malice; no vain zeal for earthly things; no gambling spirit, no vanity; in short a most harmonious and beautiful life.

Their whole striving, he said, seemed to be to build up the kingdom of God, and promote the well-being of human kind.

"Would that I could introduce this kind of life" this writer continues, "among the Roman Catholics; so far as I know it even surpasses that of the monasteries. Anyone who could establish such a noble way of Christian living under the protection of the authorities would be a second saint to Saint Dominic or Francis."

But to the writer in question the orthodox Catholic faith was even more essential than pure living. Both,



however, are to be cultivated. Unfortunately, so he thinks, one has the orthodox faith, but not the noble life; while the other, though leading a pure life, yet is heretical in his faith.

"I have said to myself," he concludes, "If you could just convert these stubborn Anabaptists so that they could show your Catholic brethren their art of living, what a blessed man you would be, or if you could only persuade your orthodox brethren to lead, like the Anabaptists, such an apparently Christian and noble life, what an accomplishment would be to your credit."

Of course there were bigoted Catholic writers who could see nothing beyond their narrow orthodoxy, and who, therefore, magnified all the faults of the Hutterite system and saw nothing in the godly lives of these honest and humble followers of the early New Testament church except wolves in sheep's clothing. The Hutterite chroniclers themselves best describe this attitude among their more bigoted Catholic critics,

"As soon as we set foot out of doors," writes one of the chroniclers in the big book of Chronicles in the latter part of the sixteenth century, "we are maligned as Anabaptists, Bi-Baptists, New Baptists, Schismatics, Revolutionists, and all such sorts of blasphemous names. Everybody takes up the cry against us, and mocks us and spreads all kinds of ugly lies against us—that we eat our children, and are guilty of all sorts of unmentionable crimes even worse than that. All this because we are followers of Jesus Christ. If one goes about with only a staff in his hand, a sign that he wishes no one any harm, or if he prays before his meals, he is slandered as a heretic; but as soon as he recants and conducts himself as a heathen with a sword in his belt, and a musket on his shoulder, the world immediately welcomes him back and regards him as a good Christian. Or again, if one leaves the church and returns to his evil ways, shows himself a good fellow, begins to sing filthy drinking songs in the tavern, puts a silly feather in his cap, acts a fool generally, frequents the gambling joints and dance halls,



puts a big calf skin about his neck, and wears gay clothes, all embroidered with lace, and swears like a Frenchman, and blasphemes God, then he is welcomed back again and received by his own. You are a good fellow, they will say to him. You have done well to leave these schismatics. Such an one is doubly welcomed by the World, no matter how evil his ways may be."

Such is the reaction, according to this old chronicler, of the religious leaders of the time in the state church toward the rigid standards of conduct upheld by the Hutterites.

## Schools

It speaks well for the intelligence of the Hutterites that in an age when illiteracy was the common lot of the average man they had already developed a well organized system of compulsory education. Their education program was admirably designed to perpetuate their religious ideals and to prepare their young people for the community life they were living. First place was given to religion. "We are concerned not with worldly, but rather with heavenly wisdom" one of their teachers says.

Children were taken from their mother's breast at less than two years of age, and placed in charge of the community nursery, which was not only a nursery but also a kind of kindergarten where they were taught little prayers, simple Bible verses, and given such religious training as their little minds could absorb. At five or six the children were placed under formal school discipline, girls and boys separately. Religion, vocation, and good citizenship in the Household community were the objectives of this program. All were taught reading and writing, the history of the church, the catechism, and such other religious precepts as would make them not only good Christians but good Hutterites as well. Besides,

the boys were all taught some trade or prepared for some special work to which they would be assigned later in life; the girls were instructed in spinning, and general household duties. The whole course of instruction led directly to membership in the church and some allotted place in the community scheme. Practically all were baptized, supposedly upon a confession of faith, but sometimes quite young.

Since child welfare was a community concern, it was perhaps only natural that the rules and regulations governing child training should pay more attention to the physical well being of children than was true of the usual school systems of that time. In a code of instructions given by Peter Walpot, a celebrated leader in the church at that time, to a gathering of teachers of Auspitz in 1568, and later enlarged into one of the earliest treatises on teaching to be found in all Europe, numerous practical measures are suggested for the physical care of children. Long before the discovery of the germ theory of disease, sick children here in the dormitories were to be segregated from the well; teachers and nurses, when examining the mouths of diseased children, were to be careful to wash their hands before examining others, so as not to contaminate those not sick. Children when coming to the schools from outside the community as often happened, for Hutterite schools had a good reputation among their neighbors, were to be carefully examined for contagious diseases, and segregated if necessary. Special precaution was taken against what was called the "French disease" which seemed prevalent throughout Europe of that day, though perhaps rare among the Hutterites themselves, because of their high standards of social morality. Bed linen should be changed often and always kept clean. The admonition to bathe at least once each month may seem somewhat conservative in these days

of the modern bath tub, but no doubt unusually liberal in an age when the taking of a bath by even so prominent a person as Queen Elizabeth was an event worthy of special mention by the court chronicler. Each child was to have its own comb and brush.

Play was given little recognition in this school program. Rules stipulating hours for work and everything else were carefully prescribed, complains one writer, but not one hour for play. The value of physical exercise was recognized, however. The teachers were instructed not to send their children to bed immediately after supper, since that was against nature; but some exercise should be taken before retiring; walking was recommended under the guidance of the teacher or some other older person. Among other regulations designed to promote the physical comfort of the children was one demanding that their boots be kept well-greased so that they might not become too stiff and thus produce corns on the feet of the wearer. The rule that girls should arise at five in the morning to begin their spinning, and boys at six, was perhaps not popular among the children; nor perhaps the stipulation that they retire at six o'clock in the summer and at sunset in the winter.

Children should be taught the virtues that would fit them especially to live in a closed community, according to this Hutterite school program,—patience, gentleness, modesty, self control and consideration for others. The teacher should inculcate these virtues by example rather than by the use of the rod. That human nature is not the same in all children was well recognized. Some are won with kind words, says Walpot, others by the promise of rewards; but there are those who must be ruled by a firm hand. All, however, “in the fear of the Lord.” Such gross sins as stealing and lying must be corrected by corporal punishment, administered only by the teacher, and

publicly so that all the children may be inspired with a wholesome fear of wrong doing. The teacher, who was the chief disciplinary officer of the Household, both within and without school hours, must exercise his peculiar power, not in anger but for the good of the child. The child on the other hand, according to the rules, must submit to his punishment willingly as deserving it, and must not in any way try to ward it off. The teacher of course must be careful not to inflict permanent physical injury. He is not to strike on the head or mouth, nor stop the mouth of his victim with a cushion or cloth to prevent an outcry.

The teachers were selected from the brotherhood, for life, and of course without pay; and with little preparation beyond what they had themselves received in their own elementary schools.

For higher education the Hutterites had little need, and less sympathy. In fact they forbade their members to attend schools outside of their own whereas they said "only worldly wisdom and cunning is sought, while godly things are neglected." Doctors of theology and the learned men of the universities were their chief persecutors in matters of religious orthodoxy, and it was not to be expected that they would be especially drawn toward a group that was the chief cause of their troubles.

But their elementary schools, designed to fit their children for efficient everyday living in the community, were among the best of their day, and often visited, as already suggested, by others not of their faith. Hutterite children during this period were no doubt among the most literate, the healthiest, most religious and highly trained, and best behaved of all Europe.

### *Das Gemeinde-Geschichtsbuch*

Unlike their Mennonite brethren, who were unusually

modest and fearful perhaps, about recording their doings, the Hutterites on the other hand recorded rather completely all their experiences, both religious and economic, throughout the whole of their checkered career and wanderings across southeastern Europe. These annals, usually kept by the church leaders, and by them handed down from one generation to another, seemingly were never printed in Europe, but kept in manuscript, and carried along as a priceless treasure throughout all their trekking for religious liberty. It is usually spoken of in the records as *Das Gemeinde Geschichtsbuch* (Book of Chronicles). It contains an illuminating record of the chief activities and the deaths of their church leaders; their sufferings and persecutions at the hands of their enemies; gruesome experiences at the hands of marauding armies during the numerous wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under the Turks, Catholics and Protestants; national calamities and unusual natural phenomena such as the appearance of comets, earthquakes, floods, drouths; as well as numerous rules and regulations passed from time to time controlling their communal life and religious practise. Church quarrels, as well, are faithfully recorded, and such other routine experiences as befall a humble and righteous people trying to serve their God as best they can in a cruel and unsympathetic world.

In 1883 J. von Beck published *Die Geschichtsbücher der Wiedertäufer* dealing with the Hutterite chronicles, and in 1923 Rudolph Wolkan published for the first time the *Geschichts-Buch der Hutterischen Brüder*. In 1943 this chronicle appeared again in a scholarly edition prepared by A. J. F. Zieglschmid under the title *Die älteste Chronik der Hutterischen Brüder* and published by the Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The same editor and publisher produced *Das kleine Geschichtsbuch* in 1947. The songs of the Hutterites were



published in the book, *Die Lieder der Hutterischen Brüder*, Scottdale, Pennsylvania, 1914.

### **Riedemann's *Rechenschaft***

Another work highly prized by the Hutterites, and the chief source of their confession of faith, was a book called *Rechenschaft* written about 1545, by one of their teachers and chief theologian, Peter Riedemann. This volume was published several times in Europe during the sixteenth century, but in America it was known only in manuscript until 1902, when it was printed here for the first time in Berne, Indiana. Riedemann, whom the chroniclers of the day spoke of as a "God enlightened man, and a soundly evangelical minister," spent much of his time as a messenger of the Hutterite faith throughout South Germany; and like Paul, was often in jail, and Bunyan-like wrote most of his masterpieces in prison.

The book covers the usual orthodox views on such typical Anabaptist doctrines as infant baptism, rejection of the oath, non-resistance, the magistracy and the virtues of the simple upright life; but also treats of the distinctive beliefs and doctrines which distinguish the Hutterites from other Anabaptists. A few random extracts may be of interest. On the question of community of goods Riedemann says "Worldly as well as spiritual goods are the free gift of God, and must be shared." This view is corroborated by copious scriptural quotations.

Many of the later austere social practises and traditions of the brethren find a basis in this early confession of faith. The Hutterite tailor when making clothes for outsiders evidently was expected to be more consistent in the practise of his profession than his modern brother, the Lancaster county Mennonite drygoods merchant, who today sells his customers all sorts of fine hats of the latest styles, but who at the same time permits his wife only

the old fashioned regulation bonnet; or the New Menonite barber at Bluffton, who will bob the hair of his worldly patrons without the least compunction, but would suffer the excommunication of his own daughter for a similar offence; for Riedemann exhorts the community tailors when making clothes for outsiders to serve them faithfully, but as to gaily colored clothes that are trimmed with laces, embellished borders, and all sorts of frills, which can only encourage an arrogant and proud spirit, with such the tailors should have nothing to do, in order that they might "keep their consciences clear before their God."

When brethren meet they should greet one another with the words "Peace be with you." This should come from the heart and must be more than mere lip service. This form of greeting, however, is for Christians only. He who uses these words lightheartedly, or exchanges them with a lighthearted person like a drunkard or a gambler does so at the risk of his soul's salvation. Handshaking and embracing are also symbols of unity and peace. But men and women should meet one another with a handshake only. *Zutrinken* (treating), says Riedemann, is a bad habit, leading to drunkenness, a net devised by the devil to lead sober men astray, and so to be avoided like a serpent. Singing, praying and fasting are encouraged as godly practises. Merchandising, as already indicated, is forbidden as a sinful practise, for it increases the price for the poor and takes the bread out of their mouths.

### The Thirty Years' War

The Golden Age of the brethren came to an end before the close of the sixteenth century. For the next hundred and fifty years this slowly vanishing band of devoted Christians kept up a brave but losing struggle against

great odds: first against the marauding armies of both Catholics and Protestants that swept over middle Europe during the whole first half of the seventeenth century; then against the plundering Turks during the second half; and finally against the relentless zeal of the bigoted Jesuits who during the first half of the eighteenth were determined that all dissenting sects, not officially tolerated by the Augsburg agreement of 1555, must be entirely exterminated from the Catholic possessions of the Habsburgs. By the middle of the eighteenth century the humble and faithful followers of Jacob Hutter had practically been completely rooted out of both Moravia and Hungary. Only a small remnant survived by trekking to South Russia.

During the Thirty Years' War, especially, the Hutterites, living right in the heart of the battle-torn areas of that disastrous conflict, suffered untold horrors from both armies as they marched back and forth across this ill-fated territory. As is well known, middle Europe was so completely devastated by this cruel war that it did not recover for a full century. Cities were burned down; the armies lived off the land, ruthlessly cutting down the men, and ravishing the women. The well-filled granaries, sleek cattle and fine looking horses of the *Bruderhof* offered special temptation to the marauding parties of both armies.

One citation from the records must suffice as an illustration of what must have been a rather common experience of all during that troubled period. There were many such. In 1619, twelve Households in the Moravian settlement were completely burned to the ground; seventeen others greatly damaged; forty men and women cruelly cut down in cold blood, some under severe torture; and two hundred horses, all the cattle and sheep driven away. "Many dear people," the chron-

icler of the event says, "were cut down and so cruelly and unmercifully tortured, causing such distress and misery as can hardly be conceived." The next year the community at Pribitz was attacked by fifteen hundred troops—it is immaterial whether by Catholic or Protestant, both were alike guilty of this inhuman treatment—and completely destroyed. In three hours fifty-two men were killed, and seventeen other men and women so mutilated that they died within a few days. Every sort of inhuman punishment was resorted to by these murderous plunderers. For the purpose of wringing from the brethren a confession of the hiding places of their supposed wealth they "burned them with hot irons and flaming torches, poured hot grease over their bare bodies, cut deep wounds into their flesh, which they filled with powder, then ignited, jerked off their fingers, slashed into them with their swords as though they were cabbage heads. One brother's head they completely twisted about so that he actually faced straight backward." All this inhuman treatment of a peaceful people was so unnecessary, since the Hutterites never resisted with force; even had they desired to do so, it would have been futile because of their inferior numbers. It was a case of pure wantonness, perpetrated by bands of roving troops undisciplined, giving way to their unbridled passions, held together by the promise of plunder, living off the fat of the land. The armies of the Thirty Years' War for the most part were inadequately supported by the central governments, and had to live off the population.

As if this were not already enough misery all at one time for a people already sorely afflicted, there soon followed now an imperial order in September of 1622, demanding that all Hutterites leave Moravia within four weeks on penalty of severe punishment if not obeyed. The Habsburg possessions had now come under complete

Catholic control. The Liechtensteins had in the meantime been succeeded by the intolerant van Dietrichsteins, whose present head was a cardinal in the church, and thus more than pleased to carry out the order of his emperor. In vain the poor people plead that they might at least be given until the next spring to make preparation for leaving, since it was now approaching winter. But their pleading fell on deaf ears. They were driven, in midwinter, several thousand of them, some twenty of the remaining Households, across the border into Hungary to seek shelter wherever they might find it. Some of them finally found their way to their brethren in Sobotiste and Levar, communities established in the preceding century. Another group started a new colony at Alwintz, near Hermannstadt, in the southeastern corner of what was then Transylvania, or Siebenbürgen, now a part of the new Roumania, being invited there by the famous Bethlen Gabor, Prince of Transylvania, one of the Protestant generals during the war, and favorable to the Protestant groups. By 1650 the last Household had vanished from what had once been the promised land of Moravia.

### **Hungary and Transylvania**

Here in Hungary and Transylvania, the Hutterites now found a temporary home for another century; but they never recovered the prosperity of their palmiest Moravian days; nor did they entirely escape the hazards of invasions and wars that continually threatened the populations of that troubled section of the European border. Their number at best could never have exceeded several thousand, and even that was continually diminishing. Throughout the latter part of the seventeenth century their settlements were subject to the continued



raids of the Turkish armies that during this period were threatening to overrun all middle Europe, culminating in the final siege of Vienna in 1683. Frequently in these raids their houses were burned down and cattle driven away; their men often carried away to the galleys, and their women to a worse fate. In 1665, they found themselves in such dire straits that they were compelled to call upon their Mennonite brethren in Holland for help; and by 1667 they had to give up their communal life for a time in some of the settlements in Hungary.

A few random extracts taken from the records will perhaps best indicate their varied experiences during the next hundred years.

1658. In this year the principality of Siebenbürgen was overrun with Turks and Tatars, robbing, murdering and burning with great damage to all the land. Over 1000 people were murdered. An unmentionable number of people and cattle were carried away; the whole land was devastated. Alwintz was almost totally destroyed.

1659. This year in January Emperor Leopold issued to the brethren a letter of protection guarding them against all marauding parties.

1662. This year in the month of May there were two heavy earthquakes which shook the buildings, which God sent us no doubt for a good reason.

1663. On the third day of September the Turks and Tatars arrived at Dechtiz a short time before dinner. They took captive thirty-five souls, and two of the brethren were cut down and murdered. The buildings were burned down, and all the crops in the fields destroyed. The next day the community at Sobotiste was destroyed.

1677. On July 9, about noon at Seniz it rained copious drops of blood which was seen by numerous witnesses.

1678. On April 27 a sister by the name of Susanna, who had been held in captivity by the Turks for fifteen years, was released upon payment of 150 florin ransom money and restored to us again without the loss of her faith. God be praised.

1679. This year was one of great heat which caused a great deal of sickness, including the pest and other evils, and took many lives. It is reported that in Vienna 20,000 died, and in Pressburg over 11,000. No doubt it was a visitation of the hand of God because of the sins of the people without any sign of repentance.

1683. The year 1683 ended with great tribulation, fear, terror, misery, famine and death. It often seemed as though everything would go to ground. Many children and older people died.

1733. In this year came the terrifying mandate that we should not baptize our newborn babes, but that we must take them to the priests for baptism or suffer a heavy penalty. The elders and the superintendent together with the brethren met at Sobotiste to consult regarding this unheard of order, and decided not without many tears and twangs of conscience, to obey this order, since there was no other way out of this tyranny. This decision caused a great deal of dissatisfaction in the church, and resulted in a division.

1748. In October, Zacharias Walter wrote to the Mennonite pastor at Amsterdam, Johann Deknatel, concerning certain points of doctrine.

1749. This year the brethren in Trenchin also were ordered to have their newborn babies baptized by the Catholic priests.

1754. The entire community at Sobotiste consists of 220 souls. They refrain from making proselytes. The *Habaner* among them, however, are not permitted to enter the Catholic church when they take their children there for baptism. They pay little attention to the church holidays. They bury their dead in their own church yards which they call "Garden of the Dead." Young people among them drink only water, from twenty years on also beer; but wine, only the elder people and the sick.

1761. On March 21, Jesuit missionaries, accompanied by four guards, appeared at Sobotiste, arrested three of the leaders, Walter, Pulmon, and Cseterle, and took them away. The meeting house was closed, the key turned over to the Jesuit representative, and the brethren were warned that

they must attend his preaching and send their children to his catechetical class. They were ordered to give up all their books, to dismiss their teachers, and send their children to the Catholic schools. The *Habaner* were forbidden to carry on their services. Many of the brethren vigorously protested against these measures and cried out that they would rather lay their necks on the block and lose their lives than obey the Catholic priest and send their children to his school.

1786. Old Jacob Miller died at Sobotiste a heretic. This Miller declared in his day that he joined the Catholics only to enjoy peace. In his heart he always remained true to the faith of his fathers.

And so it went. For the better part of three centuries this small band of humble Christians, clinging tenaciously to their convictions, and choosing rather to suffer martyrdom than forsake their faith wandered from one land to another in futile search of that religious toleration so well exemplified in their own peaceful lives; and now at the end of this period they seemingly were no nearer the goal of their quest than at the beginning. The world had become somewhat more humane but not more tolerant. Ravaged by plundering bands of marauding troops, outlawed by imperial decrees, hounded from pillar to post by both state and church, the wonder is that they did not quit the hard struggle long before. In all history there are few finer examples of courageous faith and of extreme loyalty to religious conviction.

As indicated in the records cited above, hardly had the Turkish dangers vanished before another peril appeared even more threatening to the Hutterite faith,—the firm determination of the Jesuit clergy to thoroughly root out every religious belief not specifically protected by the religious agreements of the time. The few Anabaptist groups still left in the empire were the specific objects of their wrath. This crusade reached

its peak in the reign of Maria Theresa, herself a most devoted Catholic. To one, Delphini, an ardent Jesuit and confirmed advocate of entire extinction, was committed the task of either converting the Hutterites, or driving them out of the land. This willing agent evidently was given a free hand by the imperial authorities to use such methods as he thought best to accomplish his purpose, just short of the death sentence of course. He made the most of his liberal orders

As just seen, the Jesuits forced the brethren to give up their religious books and substitute Catholic books instead, compelled them to send their children to the priests for baptism, and ordered all to attend Catholic services. They forbade them to hold meetings of their own, and when the order was disobeyed, officials often broke them up, or compelled the worshippers to remain and listen to a Jesuit sermon instead. Unwilling victims were frequently beaten into submission. Ministers especially were under suspicion, often imprisoned, sometimes dying from mistreatment. The civil authorities were in hearty sympathy with this Jesuit policy. To the contention of the Hutterites that "they had always shown themselves true and obedient subjects; had always willingly helped support the common burdens of the land; had served their landlords well; and their peaceful, sober and honest daily life was well known"; and further that "the guarantee of the religious liberty granted them in 1635 was still in force," and thus they could not convince themselves that the recent royal mandate ordering them to send their children to the Catholic schools and they must all become Catholics, represented the real intentions of the government. The authorities in turn made the counter charge that the former "would pay no war taxes, disobeyed the government, set up their own system of settling disputes, abused the sacrament of holy baptism,"

and finally that they "refused to accept the mercy offered them."

The Jesuits manifested their usual cunning in their method of undermining the faith of the Hutterites through the education of their children. The religious convictions of adults could not be changed, but children through the medium of Catholic schools might easily be turned into good Catholics. But for the older people, too, they made the way easy through compromise. After a long period of futile coercion, they finally tried persuasion and temptation. The brethren might retain some of their cherished political exemptions, their distinctive economic and social institutions, and even some of their religious practises—community houses if they so desired, and the right to baptize their own children, if they would only accept a few of the fundamental doctrines of the Catholic faith—infant baptism and attendance at Catholic services. They were also promised exemption from military service and certain objectionable war taxes. Most of the Hutterites finally accepted this half Catholic, half Hutterite compromise. *Habaner* they were later called, but nobody today knows why. But by those from whom they withdrew they were known as "stepbrothers."

The small remnant of the faithful who refused to bow the knee to Baal gradually drifted out of the Habsburg lands and crossed over into Russia which in the meantime had become the new Promised Land for many of the persecuted peoples of middle Europe. By 1800 the last followers of the old school simon-pure Hutterites had vanished from Hungary and Transylvania. These "Habaner" colonies, with their special religious and political privileges, speaking the German language, and living in closed communities, maintained their identity in Upper Hungary, now Czechoslovakia, for many years; but in course of time they lost their special status, exchanged



their foreign German for the native Slovakian, forgot their traditions, and have since become absorbed into the common civil and religious life of the community.

### **New Blood from Carinthia**

In the meantime, the original Hutterite movement, of Moravian origin, might have completely collapsed had it not been for the acquisition of new recruits from a totally unexpected quarter. In the archduchy of Carinthia, a member of the Habsburg empire, there appeared just at this time a small band of Christians, who because of their espousal of many of the doctrines of Luther, were officially known as Lutherans; but who, influenced to a large extent also by their independent reading of the Bible, and especially of the works of the highly evangelical Lutheran, Johann Arndt, an author well-known among the Mennonites of the time as well, were more like the Anabaptists in their religious views than orthodox Lutherans.

Lutherans not being tolerated in Carinthia at this time, Maria Theresa had this small band deported at government expense in 1755, to another of her possessions, Transylvania, where both Catholics and Lutherans were free to exercise their religious views; and where the emigrants were promised new homes and lands upon their arrival. But here the exiles soon ran into further trouble. The Lutherans in Transylvania did not meet the requirements of an evangelical New Testament church as the Carinthian brethren had conceived it; besides, refusing to take the oath of allegiance to the empress which was demanded of them as a pre-requisite to receiving their land grants, they were denied the promised homes. Thus they were set adrift, looking for work and a resting place wherever they could find it. Some of them wandered into Alwintz, and other Hutterite colonies about

Hermannstadt, where they found religious views and practises more like their own than any they had yet observed. Most of the exiles ultimately joined the Households of the brethren and became an integral part of the Hutterite movement from then on. The best evidence perhaps that the Carinthians remained loyal to this choice is the fact that many of the typical names found in the Hutterite Households in Dakota and Canada today trace their origin back to Carinthia—*Hofer, Kleinsasser, Müller, Glanzer, Waldner*. This Carinthian contingent became the backbone of the Transylvania Hutterite group from this time on, and was perhaps responsible for the restoration of the *Bruderhof* pattern among them.

But by casting their lot with the despised Hutterites, the new recruits forfeited the toleration promised them by the empress. As Lutherans they would have been tolerated in Transylvania, but not as Hutterites. If they would not be Lutherans they must become Catholics. And so, they now shared the common experiences of all Hutterites. Their leaders were arrested and thrown into prison, their congregations scattered; and their religious practises proscribed.

Despairing finally of finding peace in Transylvania, the whole body, both the new recruits and the faithful remnant of the older group, now decided to chance emigration across the Capathian Mountains into Wallachia, under Turkish rule, where neither Catholic nor Lutheran or Hutterite was known. All Christians looked alike to the Turk. After successfully casting the lot, upon whose favorable decision rested the determination to take this final step, a group of sixty-seven weary souls gathered at Creutz, near Alwintz, for the departure. All the villagers came out to see them off; some glad they were going; others fearful that they might be punished by the

authorities for permitting their outlawed neighbors to leave in peace.

The departing caravan, piling such of their personal belongings as they could not carry with them into two small wagons, drawn by several oxen, leaving many of their leaders behind in prison, and forsaking all their earthly possessions, started out with heavy hearts. All the able-bodied men, women and children, with packs on their backs, and some with small children as well, and staffs in their hands, trudged along on foot. Only the feeble and sick could be loaded on the few wagons. The journey toward the mountains was made mostly by night, and the larger towns were avoided. The slow climb over the mountains was especially arduous and difficult. Finally reaching safety across the border in Wallachia, they set up a temporary camp, and sent a delegation to Bucharest to find a permanent location. Here the delegation met a sympathetic German who had a large estate nearby where the tired pilgrims found a temporary home. They had to begin life all over again and erect their own shelter and primitive living quarters. "It was indeed strange for us to live in the ground, but we had peace and quiet, and above all complete freedom of conscience" says one of their number.

Unfortunately the arrival of the Hutterites here in what at first seemed a land of freedom was ill-timed. Russia and Turkey soon engaged in war, and the unlucky victims of so many troubles again found themselves right in the heart of another battle zone, where the Turks robbed them of the property and money, and sent their men into captivity and galley slavery. And so, after a few years of these experiences they decided to take up the wanderer's staff once more. They had in the meantime won the sympathy of General Semetin, the Russian general in Moldavia, by whom they were advised to settle in

South Russia where they would find not only the religious liberty they had been seeking so long, but freedom from Turkish invasions as well. Acting upon the general's advice, and with his help they left their brief Wallachian home, in 1770, and founded a new settlement on the estates of Field Marshal Count Rumyantsev at *Wischenka*, one of the count's manors, on the river Desna, in the province of Tchernigov. Here they were granted religious toleration, military exemption, financial aid, and such other concessions as Empress Catherine and local noblemen were offering at the time to industrious artisans and thrifty farmers upon their recently conquered lands. After a few years of pioneering the Hutterites now again settled down to a normal prosperous life. "So we began to settle down with our spinning and weaving and with the simple household necessities" writes Johannes Waldner, the chronicler of this period. A few years later the little colony was augmented by the arrival of most of the prisoners, who in the meantime had been released by the Habsburg authorities, including Matthias Hofer, a poet, dreamer and grumbler, who had already spent sixteen years in prison; and almost the entire Glanzer family, who had been held under examination five years in the city hall. The commanding general gave them a passport and permitted them to take their inheritance with them. They were given an escort to the border. Only three sisters remained in the land, and they had married and accepted the Lutheran faith. But, says historian Johannes Waldner, "They had little happiness and joy, and suffered much, for they had a bad conscience all the time, and did not attend the Lutheran church, not even the Lord's Supper, and would rather have come back to the brotherhood if they had been free."

Some years later such of the brethren as had remained faithful to the Hutterite teachings in Hungary, or hav-

ing joined the "Habaner" under pressure had again come back into the fold, also found their way to Russia. As seen above, by 1800, outside of the few scattered "Habaner" settlements in Hungary, the land of the autocratic czars became the sole home and asylum of the long persecuted followers of Jacob Hutter.

## **In Russia**

Here at Wischenka the brethren now enjoyed for a time the complete religious toleration and economic freedom which they had been in search of so long. It seems a strange irony of fate, and a travesty on the good name of the Christian religion, to have one set of Christians hounded from one Christian country to another, and even burned at the stake by another set of so called followers of the same faith, and to have the victims of this intolerance finally find refuge from persecution only by fleeing across the borders into the land of the heathen Turk, and the half heathen Russian, neither of whom had the advantage of the spiritual enlightenment of the great Reformation.

In fact here in the land of the big Bear, they enjoyed almost too much economic and political freedom; for like their fellow Germans, the Mennonites, and other religious colonists in South Russia, they were granted economic and social liberties above those of the native Russians themselves, most of whose peasants were still serfs. And so it was not altogether unexpected that upon the death of their benefactor, Count Rumyantsev, his son and heir, forgetting the promises made by the father, tried to reduce the Hutterite colony to the status of his native tenants, that of serfdom. Unable to turn their new landlord from his determination, the brethren appealed to St. Petersburg, and in 1801 secured from here a grant of



land on the crown properties a little farther down the Desna in the same province, and under the same liberal terms granted the Mennonites just the year before. To this place, called *Raditschew*, they removed their colony, forty-four families, the same year, and re-established a *Bruderhof* along the old traditional communistic lines.

The Raditschew community grew slowly in numbers. The colonists soon built a mill along the Desna, and developed the different trades required for running a self-sufficing economic community; but they never quite reached the high degree of well-being enjoyed during their brief stay at Wischenka. The community life, too, did not seem to function as smoothly in the days of freedom as it had in the earlier days of persecution. The tradesmen especially were loath to turn over the whole of the profits they sometimes made out of their efforts. The rules of the society demanded that each trade should have its master whose duty it was to purchase the raw material necessary, see to the manufacturing of the product, and sell the finished goods. The profits were to be turned over into the common treasury. But each master was inclined to handle the profits himself, so complained one of the leaders of the time, and to turn over to the superintendent only the records. Quite a number seemingly preferred the greater freedom outside the community to the more restricted life within the Household. Among these was Jacob Walter, assistant to the elder, who had built a house of his own for his family outside the community house. This division between the elder Johannes Waldner, who represented the old order favoring communism, and his assistant Jacob Walter, who did not, divided the colony into two almost equal factions on this crucial question. Both leaders were equally stubborn in maintaining their views. "I would rather go to the martyr's stake than give up the old traditions," said the

grey-haired Johannes Waldner. "I would die before going back to community life again," replied his younger opponent and assistant.

Walter appealed to the government at St. Petersburg to arbitrate the matter, and especially to permit those desiring to withdraw to share the community property equally with those who remained. The government, especially interested at this time in everything that promoted the welfare and harmony of its numerous foreign colonies in South Russia, assumed the task of smoothing out the troubles. The St. Petersburg representative, however, seemingly not favorable to the community system, sent in an unfavorable report on the economic and social conditions in the *Bruderhof*. The Hutterites were not as prosperous nor as far advanced culturally, he said, as the rest of the German colonists in New Russia. Children were not as well taken care of as under an individual system. And that is perfectly obvious, he added, because it is against nature, since neither father nor mother can do for their children what they would if they alone were responsible for their care. The general health of the people as a whole was not as good. In the whole colony of fifty families only two persons have passed the age of fifty years. The population growth has been slow. Since 1802 when the settlement was founded there has been an increase of only fifty-eight souls. At that rate it will take them sixty or seventy years to double their number, while among the Mennonites it takes only thirty years. So reported this investigator.

All attempts to bring about unity, however, were in vain. Walter and his party withdrew from the brotherhood, taking with them their share of the community property. But in the end everything worked out well. Some of the dissenters, not finding their independence what they had expected, returned the next year; and in

the meantime a fire completely destroyed the buildings of the old *Bruderhof*. Rather than rebuild, now both parties agreed to dissolve the "Brotherhood" and distribute all the property. And so, in 1819, the community way of life was again given up by the Hutterite brethren. Stout hearted old Johannes Waldner, however, did not long survive his disappointment. He died the next year.

The rest of the story of the Hutterites in Russia can be told in a few words. They gradually recovered their material prosperity and their spiritual balance. By 1842 their population had increased to such extent that they petitioned for, and were granted a new tract of land in the Molotschna region, near the Mennonite settlement. Here Johann Cornies, the well-known Mennonite educational and agricultural leader, helped them to locate a new colony which they called *Hutterthal*. A little later a daughter colony was established not far off by the name of *Johannesruh*, followed soon after by *Neu-Hutterthal*. In 1859 a number of the poorer families in the villages, deciding to revive the communal pattern under the old system, established a *Bruderhof* which they named *Hutterdorf*. When in the early seventies the German colonists of South Russia lost their military exemption and other special economic and political privileges so generously granted them in the former century, the Hutterites living in the *Bruderhof* as well as those living in separate homes, decided to follow the Mennonites to America, a new land of freedom. The Hutterdorf communists came first in 1874; followed by Hutterthal and Johannesruh in 1877; and finally by all the rest in 1879. All these settled in the James River Valley in the Dakotas, some establishing themselves on communal Households; and others settling on individual farms.

## VIII

# RUSSIA

The story of the Mennonites of Russia prior to World War I furnishes a pleasant relief from that of their brethren in the other countries heretofore mentioned. Instead of bitter persecution and relentless oppression, their common lot elsewhere, the Mennonites meet here in the land of the most arbitrary ruler of all Europe the greatest encouragement to expand their settlements, and the widest liberty to practice their beliefs according to their convictions. The course of their unhampered development also suggests the direction Mennonitism may sometimes take when it is free to apply its principles, economic and religious, to every day living.

Catherine's invitation to the Danzig and West Prussian Mennonites to locate on her crown lands in South Russia came at a most opportune time. The empress who in 1762, had succeeded to the crown of all the Russias, although unprincipled and savagely cruel as a woman, but nevertheless shrewd, and farsighted as a ruler, did much for the political and economic development of her vast empire. Regarding agriculture as the backbone of national prosperity, according to the economic theories of the time, she became very much interested in settling her unoccupied agricultural lands, of which she had millions of acres along the Black and Caspian seas, recently won from the sultan of Turkey, with industrious and thrifty farmers—land still unoccupied except by scattered bands of half civilized nomadic tribes of Tatar origin. Since the native Russian peasants and serfs were neither

available nor entirely satisfactory as settlers for these raw, semi-arid regions, she turned elsewhere for more suitable prospective colonists.

Soon after her accession, the ambitious empress advertised the advantages of her crown lands far and wide throughout Europe, wherever people were hampered in their religious liberties, or were dissatisfied with their economic or political status, offering most liberal inducements to prospective agricultural colonists—such as free lands in abundance, free transportation and support until such time as the settlers should be established in their own homes, tax exemption for a limited time, exemption from military duty and certain civil obligations, religious toleration, and wide liberty in establishing such educational and local political institutions as best suited their needs—privileges far beyond those enjoyed by the native Russians themselves.\*

Typical of a number of early colonies established on the basis of these liberal terms was a group of Moravian Brethren, who located near the Mohammedan frontier along the lower Volga in 1764, attracted no doubt more by the prospects of a promising missionary field among the Tatars, than by the desire to better their economic condition. Few of these numerous early attempts at colonization were successful. But with the appointment, in 1774, of Prince Potemkin, successful general in the Turkish wars, and one of Catherine's favorites, as governor general of South Russia a more vigorous and successful colonization policy began. Among the various projects sponsored by the governor general during this period was the invitation, extended in 1786 through

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\* The term colonist as applied here and throughout this chapter has reference only to the foreigners, mostly Germans—Mennonites and others—who were invited by Catherine and her successors, to locate on the frontier areas of Russia under special inducements.



George von Trappe, a Russian colonization agent of German extraction, to certain discontented citizens of the city of Danzig at the time of the first partitioning of Poland.

In this invitation the oppressed Mennonites of Danzig and West Prussia were included. At the suggestion of von Trappe the Mennonite churches decided to send two representatives, Jacob Höppner, and Johann Bartsch, at Russian expense, to spy out the promised land.

These devoted men set out in the summer of 1786, on what all their brethren at that time considered a long and perilous journey. Sailing to Riga, then crossing over to the Dnieper, they reached a station called Dubrovna in late November. From here they sailed down the river, looking for a desirable settling place. At Krementschug they met Potemkin, and in May of the following year, they were presented to Catherine herself, who was on her first tour of inspection to her newly-won territories. After selecting a desirable location near Berislav along the Dnieper, not far from where that stream flows into the Black Sea, a rich level plain, quite similar to the lowlands of their own Vistula delta, as a promising site for their prospective settlements, the deputies started on their way homeward, returning, however, by way of St. Petersburg, where they met various government officials, including Crown Prince Paul, and secured official confirmation of the promises made them by von Trappe. They reached Danzig after a year's absence, in 1787, without any serious mishaps except that Bartsch had frozen his toes during the winter, and Höppner had delayed their return by several months because of a broken leg.

The favorable reports about the promised land brought back by the deputies, supplemented by a vigorous campaign for colonists on the part of von Trappe, who in the meantime had been appointed official direc-

tor of the proposed enterprise, aroused keen interest, among both the Danzig and Prussian Mennonites in the emigration movement. The wily von Trappe, in his eagerness to serve his Russian masters was none too scrupulous in the methods used for winning support for his cause. To secure the aid of one of the Danzig elders, Peter Epp, he presented the elder with a personal gift. Forbidden by the elders, who had been instructed by the Danzig authorities not to permit public solicitation for emigrants, to appear publicly before the congregations in behalf of his project, von Trappe accomplished his end without violating the letter of the law by stationing himself outside the church door, handing out his circulars to the congregation as they passed out. The elders, too, who were in sympathy with the emigration project, could also thus truthfully say to the Danzig magistrate that there was no solicitation with their consent.

### THE CHORTITZA SETTLEMENT

A party of four families had already left for Riga before the deputies returned, and it was reported that hundreds of families were ready to depart immediately. But neither the Danzig nor Prussian authorities, however eager they may have been to make the further expansion of the Mennonite settlements impossible, were anxious to lose to their Russian rivals any of their prosperous farmers or industrious laborers. Passports were thus denied to all prospective emigrants who had property, and granted only to the poor. By the fall of 1788 two hundred and twenty-eight families, nearly all from the poorer working classes of Danzig, and mostly from the Flemish branch of the church, had gathered at Dubrovna, having arrived here by the same route taken by the deputies two years before. Here they were forced to encamp for the winter, both because of the lateness of

the season, and also because of renewed warfare between Russia and Turkey along the frontier farther south.

The enforced stay for the winter at Dubrovna of this band of pioneers was not a happy one. Poverty stricken, largely supported at government expense, awaiting an uncertain future during a long cold winter in temporary shelters, and homesick, their prospects seemed none too bright. Added to these material discomforts, there was a certain degree of religious unrest due to the rivalry of the two religious factions represented—Flemish and Frisian; and the lack of a preacher to minister to their spiritual needs.

This troublesome Frisian-Flemish division had been imported from Holland to Danzig and Prussia several hundred years before; and the rift between the two groups even now, in their early Russian period, was as wide as ever. Even intermarriage between the two factions was forbidden on pain of excommunication. But more disturbing still was the strange fact that among a thousand pious souls who had left their Danzig home largely to escape religious oppression, there wasn't a preacher among them. It was customary at this time among the Mennonites everywhere to choose their ministers from the laity, and they were to serve without pay. It was usual, consequently, to choose them from the class that could afford to serve, the well-to-do class, generally the thrifty farmers. But the well-to-do among the Danzig Mennonites were denied passports. Even the elders of the home churches in a meeting at Rosenort held before the departure of the emigrants, could find no one suitable in the whole body worthy of assuming spiritual leadership, undoubtedly because of their economic status. And so this group of pioneers had to leave for their new home religiously unorganized and spiritually shepherdless.

Worship service, of course, could be read by a lay-

man from a book of sermons, a practise still quite common at that time in most of the Mennonite churches; but only an elder could administer the rites of communion and baptism, and perform marriage ceremonies. Ten young couples at Dubrovna, ripe for marriage, added urgency to the demand for an ordained elder. An elder, however, could be installed only in person by another regularly ordained elder. The home Flemish church to whom a request had been sent for an elder, after a meeting of elders in which no one was found willing or able to make the long journey to Russia, suggested to the brethren at Dubrovna that they send a list of satisfactory candidates for the ministry from which a selection might be made, by the Prussian elders, and authorized by written confirmation. This was done, and three ministers were thus selected including Bernhard Penner, who a little later was also ordained as the first elder in Russia by the same procedure.

In the meantime, with the coming of spring the Dubrovna group continued its journey down the river to their destination, the more prosperous on their own wagons by land, the poorer by river barge. But on the way they were doomed to another crushing disappointment. The deputies were informed by Potemkin that instead of proceeding to the fertile fields chosen for them two years before at Bereslav, near which the Turkish wars were still raging, they would have to settle on lands farther up the river, near a small tributary called Chortitza, a region that turned out to be far less desirable than the original site farther south.

### **Economic Difficulties**

Great was the disappointment of the weary colonists, when upon their final arrival at Chortitza, in July of 1789, they first sighted the bare and hilly waste that was to be

their new home, their promised land. What they saw, instead of the flat fertile fields, like those in their own Vistula delta, such as the deputies had promised them, was a wide, rocky barren steppe, cut through with deep gullies, filled at that season of the year with patches of dried up grass; no sign of a living thing anywhere, much less of human habitation save the wreck of a deserted palace, the remains of one of the ghost villages erected by Potemkin some time before to impress the empress with the growing prosperity of her new crown lands.

Such was the disappointment of these lonely home-seekers that a small group, the most discontented, refused to unpack their goods, hoping that at the last minute the Russian Government might relent and offer them a more promising site. Others, more optimistic, including the two deputies, pronouncing the land good, immediately began the erection of their more or less temporary homes. When it finally became evident that no other location was forthcoming, even the discontented were forced to dig in for the winter, and gradually adapted themselves to their new situation.

These first temporary living quarters, of course, were mere makeshifts of real homes. While both Höppner and Bartsch were able to erect rather substantial dwellings, the rest were not so fortunate. The building material promised by the government was slow in arriving. Many of them erected crude sod shanties, partly below and partly above ground, with thatched roofs; others set up temporary tents; a few of the most dissatisfied colonists remained in their wagons for the time being. A number had to be cared for during the following winter in the nearby government barracks at Alexandrovsk.

This first fall and winter was a trying one for the pioneer settlement. The improvised huts offered but



little shelter against the unexpected heavy fall rains and the winter winds. The scant food furnished by the government consisted largely of a broth made from mouldy rye flour secured from distant public supply granaries. The money promised for their support, now that the colonists had safely reached their destination, was slow in coming, much of it finding its way into the pockets of greedy public officials. The country round about, not far removed from the frontier, abounded in thieving natives, who had little regard for property rights. These pilferers stole the building material meant for the colonists as it floated down the river, and appropriated their personal belongings. The baggage which had been sent down from Dubrovna on river barges was carelessly handled, and such as had not been completely ruined by the rains, was pillaged of its contents; trunks and boxes had been broken open, and clothing, personal effects and precious heirlooms were taken out and exchanged for stones or other useless freight.

On the occasion of their first communion service the next spring held in an old abandoned building, under the ministry of their newly selected elder, Bernhard Penner, he was sorely grieved because, owning only a pair of *Bastelschuhe*, the usual footwear of the average poor Russians and also of the colonists at this time, he keenly felt the humility of officiating on this solemn occasion without shoes. Finally, several of the more prosperous members of his flock, after diligent search, gathered together a pair of boots for the elder so that he might administer this sacred duty in the proper manner. Loud were the sobs, it is said, that swept through the audience as the participants in this first communion service were reminded in their present miserable situation of the happy homes they had left behind in the Vistula lowlands. *Blut-arm an Leib und Seele* one chronicler calls them.

In the meantime, becoming convinced of the fact that this was to be their permanent home under any conditions, favorable or otherwise, the settlers began the distribution of the land among the heads of the families. At first, following their Prussian custom, each family started to live on its own farm; but the need for protection against marauders drove them to settle in small groups, some fifteen to thirty families to a village. Eight villages were thus laid out in the beginning, with *Chortitza* as the center of the settlement; and the others with such local descriptive names as *Rosenthal*; or reminders of their Prussian homes—*Einlage*, *Neuenberg*, and *Schönhorst*.

The hardships of this first winter continued for some years. Many of the first colonists, being city laborers, knew little about farming; and those who came from the farms discovered that the farm methods used on their Vistula swamps were not applicable to the dry and barren steppe lands along the Chortitza. Grasshoppers, drought, and inexperience made the first years lean ones. Material poverty, too, was matched with spiritual discontent. The disillusioned element which had never become completely reconciled to their lot, seeking justification for their disappointment, blamed especially the two deputies as the cause of most of their trouble, charging them especially with having betrayed their trust, accepting government money which was meant for all the settlers, and with erecting finer homes than the rest could afford.\*

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\* The deputies evidently were promised and granted a reward by the Russian government for the part they played in the promotion of the colonization project, and no doubt they received some special favors for this service. Incidentally such disputes are common in every colonization enterprise. A number of the leaders in the immigration movement to America, in 1874, received similar favors from American railroad companies and Canadian land departments; and were likewise severally criticized by their fellow immigrants for accepting them.

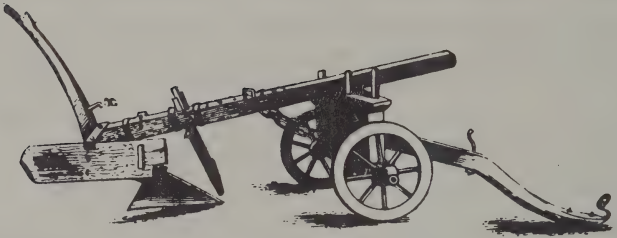
So bitter was the feeling that had been worked up against these men that both were excommunicated from the Flemish church of which they were members. With the connivance of corrupt Russian officials, Höppner's enemies even had him arrested and put in prison, only to see him released, however, sometime later. Bartsch, after making the customary confession required by the church of its backsliders, was again reinstated into full membership in his congregation. Höppner was not so easily satisfied. He affiliated himself with the Frisian branch of the church and became a citizen of the nearby city of Alexandrovsk. Just before his death he requested that he be buried on his private estate, and not in the common cemetery by the side of his fellow colonists who had made him so much trouble in his early career. But time is a great healer of wounds. In 1889, on the hundredth anniversary of the founding of the colony, the great-grandchildren of the men who had thrown Höppner into jail erected a marble shaft to his memory on the spot of his burial.

## Religious Problems

The question of a satisfactorily ordained elder also remained a matter of dispute for some time. Elder Penner, before his death in 1791, had ordained a successor in the person of one David Epp. But there were still a number of the more conservative members of the church who, because Penner had not been personally ordained according to the traditions of the church, refused to recognize either Penner or his successor as a legitimate elder. This controversy, together with the charges against the two deputies, kept the churches in a religious turmoil for several years.

The demand that the home church send an author-

ized elder to settle these controversies finally bore fruit. In 1794 the Flemish congregations of Prussia at last dispatched elder Cornelius Regier, from the Heubuden congregation, and Cornelius Warkentin to the distracted congregations along the Dnieper. These emissaries of good will were accorded a hearty welcome by both the Flemish



Plow and Threshing Stone of Pioneer Days in Russia

and Frisian groups. They held numerous conferences with opposing factions, received a number of young members into both churches by baptism, and did much to restore harmony among the various quarrelling factions; but they were not successful in healing the breach with the two deputies. Elder Regier died within a few months. Before his death, however, he had installed his travelling companion, Cornelius Warkentin, as elder, who remained with the pioneer settlement for several years, doing much during that period to reconcile the colonists to their new home, and placing the religious life of the community on a safe basis.

In spite of the prospects of financial poverty and spiritual decadence, however, in the new home, emigration from the delta congregations did not abate. When Danzig was annexed to Prussia in the second partitioning of Poland, many of the Mennonites of both Danzig and Prussia, preferred the uncertainties of Russia to those of Prussia. Between 1793 and 1797, one hundred and eighteen additional families, more prosperous than the first party had been, mostly farmers, and largely from the Frisian persuasion, found their way to the frontier settlement. Some of these remained for a time among the earlier established communities; the rest established two new villages, *Kronsgarten* and *Schönwiese*. Others followed. In the meantime, too, a new migration had begun to the new colony farther south on the Molotschna. By 1824 some four hundred families had located in the Chortitza colony, grouped into eighteen villages, at a cost to the Russian government of several hundred thousand dollars.

Meanwhile in 1796, Catherine died, to be succeeded by her son Paul. The Chortitza colonists, concerned for their special privileges under a new ruler, sent a delegation to St. Petersburg for the purpose of securing a writ-



ten guarantee from the new ruler that their former liberties might be continued. After an extended stay in the capital city, the delegates returned, in 1800, with the precious document in their possession, guaranteeing for both old and new settlers all the exemptions and privileges granted the original colonists, and several new ones added, the most important being: 175 acres of free land to each family, religious toleration, exemption from military and certain civil services, and from the use of the oath in all judicial processes, wide liberty in establishing their own schools in their own language, and such political and economic institutions as might be most suitable to their own needs, the right of forbidding the erection of taverns in their midst, and the right to manufacture their own beverages, a concession usually only granted noblemen. Continued support was granted of course to future immigrants, though this was not a specific promise in the new charter of privileges.

All colonists, too, during this period, were placed under certain restrictions, though these were not specifically mentioned in the above charter. While religious toleration was fully granted, proselyting among members of the orthodox state church was forbidden. Since the special privileges were granted to specific groups, the privileges in question would be annulled when the privileged person left the group. Children of mixed marriages would take the status of the non-privileged parent. Since the colonists were invited in as model farmers, the model farm of 175 acres could not be divided by inheritance but must remain intact. Title to the land was not unlimited, and could not be sold without the consent of the village.

### THE MOLOTSCHNA COLONY

Encouraged by these written guarantees, and at the same time driven by new restrictions upon their religious

liberties and economic privileges by the king of Prussia to seek relief elsewhere, the Prussian Mennonites again revived their interest in the migration to South Russia. Great numbers decided to leave. The movement began in the summer of 1803 with the departure of one hundred and sixty-two families, to be followed the next year by a group of about equal size. The Russian Government, which continued its interest in further colonization, in the meantime had set apart for the Mennonite settlers a tract of land of about three hundred thousand acres on a fertile, treeless plain, in the province of Taurida, south of Chortitza, along the Molotschna, a small stream running parallel with the Dnieper and flowing into the sea of Azov. Most of these colonists were from the region of Marienburg and Elbing, and were rather well-to-do farmers. After paying the ten percent emigration tax, they still had enough capital left with which to stock up their new farms. Only a small minority had to accept the help of the Russian Government still offered poor immigrants. This immigration movement continued for some years. Each year found long wagon trains loaded with household furniture and farm equipment, crossing Poland and South Russia by way of their Chortitza brethren to their new settlement on the Molotschna. By 1820 some six hundred families had found their way to this colony; and during the next twenty years four hundred more. By 1840, forty-six villages had been established with a total population of about ten thousand. By this time, however, the Russian Government had practically ceased to offer its earlier generous inducements to prospective foreign colonists.

Like those of Chortitza, the Molotschna settlers named many of their villages after their Prussian homes. *Halbstadt* became and remained afterwards the center of the new colony. Other Prussian namesakes were

*Tiegenhagen, Ladekopp, Rosenort, Tiege, and Ohrloff.* Among the more important of the numerous later villages to be founded were *Alexanderwohl* settled in 1820, and *Gnadenfeld* some time afterwards. The former was composed of an entire church congregation which had migrated in a body from Poland, near Schwetz, under the leadership of their elder, Peter Wedel. Tradition has it that on their way to Molotschna they met the Czar Alexander on one of his itineraries among his subjects, who, on learning their destination, wished them well, whereupon they named their later settlement *Alexanderwohl*.

This congregation and village had while in Prussia affiliated with the Old Groningen Society of The Netherlands. In 1874 most of the congregation again migrated as a body to the plains of Kansas, where they established another *Alexanderwohl*. *Gnadenfeld*, likewise, consisted of an organized church congregation which harked back to the Old Flemish wing in Holland; and which found its way to South Russia by a series of treks during the centuries through Poland, West Prussia, and the Markgrate of Brandenburg. The *Gnadenfeld* congregation became the center, during the middle of the past century, of a vigorous missionary movement and a religious revival that finally swept through the whole Mennonite settlement of South Russia.

The Molotschna settlers, as already intimated, being better farmers, and blessed with greater material prosperity than their fellow Mennonites in Chortitza, were spared much of the economic hardships of the latter. Taganrog, on an arm of the Azov, furnished a ready market for their dairy products during the early years until wheat growing became an important industry. Then, too, since they brought their preachers with them they escaped the early years of religious anarchy which marred the peace of their fellow Mennonites to the north.

Although more prosperous materially, and more peaceful spiritually, the new colonists were not spared the usual dangers of pioneer settlements. Their colony was located far out on a treeless steppe, well on the outskirts of civilization, nearer the frontier than the Chortitza colony. Just to the south were still to be found bands of half savage, nomadic Tatars, not yet reconciled to their removal by government order from the Molotschna valley to make room for the German Mennonites; and who, for that reason, hated these newcomers as did our Indians the American frontiersmen. They often raided the Mennonite settlement, driving off the settlers' horses and cattle. Steppe-riding to protect their property against these marauders became a thrilling adventure for many a young Mennonite during this early period. After one of these raids by the Tatars had resulted in the death of four Mennonites, the Russian Government took more drastic measures against the tribesmen, forbidding them the right to carry their usual weapons—long poles, spiked and weighted at the ends, weapons used on their hunting expeditions. Later on, however, natives and Mennonites lived side by side on friendly terms, until the middle of the past century when the former were crowded out to newer frontiers to the southeast.

### Other Prussian Groups

In addition to the two large Mennonite colonies just described, several smaller groups had located within the czarist Russian empire during this period. These, together with several congregations originally in Poland, but who, after the partitioning of that unhappy nation, found themselves under Russian jurisdiction, may be roughly divided into three groups.

a. *Deutsch-Kazun*, and *Deutsch-Wymisle*, along the Vistula near Warsaw, were daughter colonies of the

Graudenz and Culm congregations in West Prussia. They were founded during the latter part of the eighteenth century, when that region was still under Polish jurisdiction, but found themselves within the czar's empire when the final partitioning took place. A number of the members of these congregations emigrated to the Molotschna settlement during the nineteenth century; and from there some of them finally found their way to America.

b. The settlement at *Deutsch-Michalin* near Machnovka, on the western border of the province of Kiev, just across from Volhynia, was composed of Prussians, who had migrated to that region about the same time the first colony came to Chortitza. In 1802 many of these Michaliner, dissatisfied with their land contracts, moved over into Volhynia, near Ostrog, where they finally developed a number of villages including *Karolswalde*, *Antonovka*, *Waldheim*, and *Fürstlandsdorf*. They were granted small farms here on the estate of a nobleman, on terms quite similar to those offered the large colonies on the crown lands at Chortitza and Molotschna. This small group did not prosper as well, however, as those who remained at Michalin. They remained poor throughout their stay in Russia, devoting themselves largely to small farming, dairying, linen weaving, and day labor in neighboring cities. They were influenced more than any other Mennonite group by their unwholesome Polish environment; at the time of their American emigration, in the early seventies of the past century, they were among the least prosperous, and the most backward both religiously and socially of all those who found their way to the new world. Neither of these groups, it will be noted, were "colonists" in the real sense—that is, they were not located on Russian frontier territory under the special inducements offered by the Russian government.



c. *Samara*. The failure of the Prussian constitution of 1850 to provide for military exemption on religious grounds caused considerable anxiety among certain of the more scrupulous Mennonites of West Prussia. After vainly petitioning the Berlin Government for a reinstatement of their ancient privileges, these decided upon emigration to Russia. But after the special inducements offered the earlier Mennonite colonists, it was extremely doubtful whether more Mennonites would be welcomed by the czar's government. Finally, however, permission was secured to locate a limited number of settlers along the Volga, in the province of Samara, on terms still quite liberal, though no longer as generous as those offered the first colonies. A large compact area of land was offered the Mennonites on easy terms; freedom from military service for twenty years, after which each colonist was to pay a special exemption tax; each family to deposit three hundred and fifty thaler with the Russian embassy at Berlin as surety that they would not prove a burden to the Russian Government.

Two settlements were finally established in this region. The first was located in what was known as the *Trakt* in 1853, under the leadership of one Claass Epp. This colony east of the Volga in the province of Samara was given the name *Köppenthal* after one of the Russian officials who had been especially helpful in its establishment. In the course of the next twenty years it expanded into ten villages with such names as *Hahnsau*, *Ohrloff*, etc. The second settlement was begun in 1861 in the province of Samara, known as *Alt-Samara* to distinguish it from a later settlement known as *Neu-Samara*. Among the ten villages into which this settlement expanded during the next fifteen years, *Alexandertal* is best known. The latter, however, were granted privileges slightly less liberal than the former. The settlers had to buy their

land from the crown; military exemption before the paying of the special exemption tax was to run for only three years. Several hundred families migrated to these two Volga colonies during the period, nearly all from West Prussia, and most of them fairly well-to-do when they came.

### Non-Prussian Groups

a. Among the Mennonite settlements in Russia, not of Prussian origin was a group of *Swiss* who had migrated to Polish Russia from Galicia before the close of the eighteenth century. They had originally come to Galicia from the Palatinate, and Montbeliard, France; and by 1785, had settled in Polish Russia among the earlier group of Hutterites and Prussian congregations. They were of original Amish descent, and seemingly had some difficulty in fitting in with other groups. After considerable shifting from place to place in Russia some of them finally found a resting place at *Eduardsdorf*, near Dubna, in the province of Volhynia in 1815. By 1837 two more congregations were established—*Horodischitze* and *Waldheim*. In 1861 the *Eduardsdorf* congregation moved to the east side of the province, near Zhitomir, and founded the new settlement of *Kutusovka*. These were all of the same group that had originally located in Galicia, some of whom had remained in that Austrian province. Their Swiss origin is shown by such common names as *Krehbiel*, *Schrag*, *Rupp*, *Stucky*, *Kaufman*, *Flickinger*, *Miller*, *Graber*, *Goering*, etc.

b. The *Galician* Mennonites near Lemberg have been referred to in the chapter on the South German Mennonites. Their history is somewhat related to that of the Swiss. However, they did not migrate as a body to the prairie states as the Swiss did. Common names among them are: *Bachmann*, *Linscheid*, *Rupp*, *Müller*, *Ewy*, etc.

c. *Hutterites*. The Russian experiences of this group has been told in an earlier chapter.

### **Number of Original Colonists**

As to the number of Mennonite immigrants who came to the original colonies from Prussia and elsewhere by 1870, students of the movement are not agreed; but perhaps an estimate of nine thousand is not far wrong. Of these at least seven thousand located in the Chortitza and Molotschna colonies, and perhaps eight thousand were Prussians. By this time, 1870, the original numbers had increased to about forty-five thousand. Exclusive of the eighteen thousand that had migrated to America during the seventies, forty daughter colonies had been established by 1914 with a total population in all settlements of about one hundred thousand occupying a land area of nearly three million acres—a total land complex, three times the size of the state of Rhode Island.

## **ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROGRESS**

### **Early Agricultural Life**

As already suggested, these early colonists, both Danzig artisans and Prussian farmers, formed themselves into village groups averaging from fifteen to thirty families each. Following their Prussian style of architecture, they placed house, barn, stable and shop all under one roof, gable end facing the front, and located along one wide street which at first became lined with some sort of fruit trees, but in course of time with poplar or other fast-growing shade trees. The front yard became a flower garden, and the rear a fruit orchard and truck patch. The first buildings were rudely constructed of mud walls and thatched roofs, but later replaced by substantial structures of wood or brick.

Stretching out and away from the village over the treeless steppes were the arable farm lands; and the common pastures where the village cattle were herded, or where the municipal sheep flocks were sometimes kept until such time as the common land might be turned into grainfields as the growing population demanded. While each head of a family was entitled to one hundred and seventy-five acres, the land was divided for farming purposes into a number of long, narrow strips radiating from the village, so distributed among the farmers that each might share equally in the good and bad land wherever there was a difference in its fertility. And so the owner did not always farm his own land. The government in the original contract forbade the sale of land to outsiders, also the division of the farm upon the death of the owner. It had to be kept intact, either in the family or by some other Mennonite. Mennonites were invited to Russia as master farmers; and a model farm supposedly needed to contain approximately one hundred and seventy-five acres. This seems the more reasonable when we remember that originally it was thought that sheep raising might be the principal source of income rather than wheat growing. In the Volga region, where the Mennonite colonists had been granted fewer special concessions than in the earlier colonies, title rested in the village as in the Russian *mir*, instead of the head of the family as in the South Russian colonies. In reality, it was only the use, rather than the ownership of land, that was granted the settler.

It was but natural that a group, so closely knit together religiously and economically as were these Mennonite colonies, should engage in a number of cooperative and communal enterprises. Neither of the two original settlements distributed all the land granted by the Russian Government, but retained a certain amount

which at first was used for common pasture land, and later leased to farmers. The income was used to build up a fund with which the surplus population some time later might be helped to found a daughter colony. The daughter colonies later in turn repeated the procedure. Each village, too, while in no way committed to socialistic theories or practises, yet engaged in a number of communal enterprises, including among others a common granary filled in prosperous years for the use of the poor in times of emergency; for the steppes of South Russia with an annual rainfall of less than fifteen inches, were occasionally subject to drought and crop failure. In 1820 the municipal sheep flock of the Chortitza colony consisted of a thousand fine merinos, while the income from the public ferry across the Dnieper amounted to two and three thousand rubles annually. The municipal distillery in that year also netted a substantial revenue for the common treasury.

At first these pioneer farmers, transplanted from the fertile soil and abundant rainfall of the Vistula Delta to the dry and barren steppes of South Russia, found considerable difficulty in adapting their farming methods to the requirements of their new environment. It took years of experimentation before they learned how to combat drought, grasshoppers and occasional crop failures. They occupied themselves in the first years chiefly with stock-raising, sheep-breeding, and such general farming as was required to meet their home demands. The silk industry for a while assumed some importance, which accounts for the large number of mulberry trees planted along the highways and around the fields in the first two colonies. Flax and tobacco, and bee culture in their turn all gave promise for a time of becoming substantial sources of income. Fruits and vegetables, and especially water melons, (*Arbusen*) found a ready market in the



larger cities nearby. With the opening of the seaport Berdiansk on the Black Sea in the middle thirties wheat-growing began to replace sheep-raising and silk- and bee-culture.

Farming methods were most primitive. Farm implements were of the crudest sort. Seeding, harvesting, and threshing were all done by hand; and labor in the early years as in all pioneer settlements was scarce. An early sign of progress was the substitution for the flail of a large cylindrical threshing stone drawn over the threshing floor by horses or oxen. The grain was stored in the attic over the living room, while the straw was used to thatch the roof, or left to rot sufficiently to furnish fuel the following year for the large brick heating oven, which was so built into the house as to serve both as an oven and a furnace.

This description of the early arrangements of course applies especially to the two original colonies of South Russia. Different agricultural conditions prevailed in the later settlements along the colder Ural highlands in the north and west Siberia, and in the arid Caucasus where irrigation was practised.

### Johann Cornies

By 1830 the experimental agricultural stage was ended. In that year some of the more farsighted and public-spirited farmers, encouraged by the *Fürsorge-Komitee*\* of Odessa, organized a semi-official association called *The Agricultural Improvement Society*, but which perhaps might more appropriately be named *Agricultural Commission*, since it had some government support. The

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\* A Board of Trustees appointed by the Russian government stationed at Odessa, supported by all the German colonists—Mennonite and non-Mennonite, whose function it was to supervise the whole political, and to a certain extent, the economic life of the colonists.

first president of this commission was a prosperous farmer of the Molotschna colony by the name of Johann Cornies. Under the presidency of Cornies the organization exerted far-reaching influence during the next twenty years, not only upon the farming methods of the Mennonite colonies, but later on upon their whole economic and social life.

Cornies, who remained at the head of this society until his death in 1848, was already a successful big-scale farmer at the time of his appointment. He conducted many experiments and developed many farm methods now well known to scientific agriculture. He became known far and wide as an agricultural expert, and his big estate on the Jushanlee became a show place for travellers through South Russia, being visited by many government officials, including both Alexander I, and Alexander II, when they were still crown princes. In the course of time Cornies accumulated a large amount of property, some of which was given him by the government as a gift in return for his services. At the time of his death he held over 25,000 acres of land with a flock of eight thousand imported Merino sheep, four hundred horses, and a large herd of thoroughbred cattle.

The work of the commission was later extended to other colonies, and was not confined to the Mennonites only, but included service for neighboring Jewish, Russian, and even Tatar settlements in the hope that these backward farmers also might imbibe some of the better farm methods from their model Mennonite neighbors. Among some of the results secured through the efforts of Cornies and his society were the practise of fallowing and dry farming; the use of fertilizers, the unsuccessful promotion of silk culture and tobacco, the four-year rotation of crops, the breeding of improved strains of livestock, the introduction of more efficient farm machinery, the erection of more practical farm buildings, and the

planting of shade and fruit trees, especially the mulberry tree for the silk growers.

As the influence of the commission grew, it was granted additional governmental recognition, and authority beyond its original field of farm improvement, some of which was often rather arbitrarily enforced by its somewhat dictatorial head. More and more supervision of the schools was also turned over to this body, and to a certain extent local poor relief, and child welfare. Model school houses were built. The poorer colonists were induced to work for the more prosperous. Neglected children, of whom there were not many, were provided for. The organization was even influential in securing regulations compelling the lazy to seek work. Many of these arbitrary regulations, strictly enforced, aroused the animosity of those affected; but that the work of the society and its chief promoter was of enduring benefit to the Mennonite colonists there can be little doubt. The commission continued its work even after the death of Cornies, though less effectively, until well into the seventies of the century, when colonists of South Russia lost many of their special privileges, and the peculiar institutions for safeguarding them were abolished by the government.

### The Land Question

Although there was little industrial development among the colonists during the early part of the century, yet nearly every village was a self-sufficient economic unit, with smiths, carpenters, shoemakers and countless other artisans, some of whom divided their time between farming and their avocation. Farming however remained the chief occupation. Industry was merely supplementary.

Aided by the Agricultural Commission, the colonists in both Chortitza and Molotschna enjoyed a steady economic growth; and in course of time converted the treeless plains into flourishing fields, orchards and pastures covered with wide expanses of wheat, and filled with fine herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. By the middle of the century the colonies, as well as the private estates outside, had accumulated wealth far beyond that of their native Russian neighbors. The Volga colonies at this time were still in the pioneer stage, and had not yet reached the same degree of prosperity. The Swiss of Volhynia were also fairly well off; but the Mennonites in Polish Russia had not kept pace with their brethren elsewhere in their pursuit of either material or cultural advancement.

Even the most prosperous settlements, however, were not without their economic troubles. Population pressure by 1870 had become a serious problem in both Chortitza and Molotschna. Up to 1840 there seemed to be no dearth of tillable land for all the families that desired to enter their government allotments. But after that, rapid population increase, and the government provision that the entire estate must pass intact to a single member of the family upon the death of the former owner, worked a hardship upon those members of the family who did not share the land inheritance. These latter had either to purchase land elsewhere, frequently possible, of course, though not always; work as farm laborers, often for a more fortunate brother; seek labor in some village industry or other line of effort. Especially after all the available estates had been distributed among the first settlers in the two colonies, the number of landless grew rapidly with the increase of population. By 1870 it is estimated that at least two-thirds of all heads of families in both colonies were without land. Many of these were granted a small patch of ground upon which to build a

house and make a living as best they could; and were spoken of as *Anwohner*.

A solution of this problem was sought quite early in the purchase of daughter colonies as an outlet for the surplus population, an early example of which was the settling of Bergthal by the excess population from Chortitza; Molotschna and later settlements made similar purchases all through the century. Sometimes well-to-do farmers bought estates outside the settlements. Occasionally, groups of settlers would locate as tenants on private estates of some nobleman. Up to the middle of the century, too, land could often be rented at a low rate from the Nogaian tribesmen nearby. Cornies sought a remedy in encouraging the manufacturing industry in the larger villages which would furnish work for the landless.

To make matters worse, the landless had no voice in seeking a remedy for this situation. The practise of keeping the entire estate intact was a government regulation, and could not be changed. Only such as owned land had a voice in the local village assembly where all land as well as other policies were determined. Too often the landholders used this monopolistic privilege to their own advantage. Surplus land, which was the property of the entire colony, and which might have been divided up into small farms to meet the demands of the landless, was often leased by the village authorities to rich landlords instead at a ridiculously low rental for sheep raising. No help could be expected from the ministers either; for since the ministry was unsalaried, they were usually chosen too frequently with an eye to their financial standing, rather than to their qualifications of spiritual leadership; and thus their interests likely would be with the land owners.

This situation naturally bred a great deal of discon-



tent among the poorer classes, and ran a dividing line through the population on the basis of land ownership, often cutting straight through the ties of domestic kinship. The cleavage finally became so well defined that the landless party organized, and in the early sixties petitioned the Russian Government for relief. Their program demanded the distribution of the remaining common land; permission to divide the full estates into smaller units with the right to vote; and the purchase by the mother colonies of new lands for the benefit of the landless. After considerable opposition on the part of the landed interests, and the usual red tape on the part of the Russian authorities, a measure of relief was finally provided by the government. It was recommended that the large estates where necessary might be divided into half and even quarter estates,  $32\frac{1}{2}$  and  $61\frac{1}{4}$  dessiatines respectively; that the surplus common land also be distributed in the form of small farms; that the broad highways leading from one village to another be narrowed, and the income from the sale of this land be invested in behalf of the unpropertied; and finally that all the owners of small farms be given equal voting rights with those owning full estates.

### Daughter Colonies

These measures finally brought some relief. By 1867 there were four hundred and twenty-five full estates, two hundred and ninety-six half estates, and fifty-one quarter estates in Chortitza and Bergthal. In the Molotschna colony there were twelve hundred full, and three hundred and twenty-two half estates. This relief, together with the development of manufacturing in a number of the villages, the establishing of daughter colonies, and the exodus to America of a third of the

entire population saved the situation for the time being from serious consequences.

Up to about 1870 several small colonies were established, always aided by the mother colony, in nearby Ukrainian territory; but after that, and especially after 1890, migration of the surplus population, and occasionally of the more religiously conscientious followed, like our own western pioneers, the frontier line of cheap lands, southeast into the Caucasus in Kuban and Terek provinces; east toward the Urals in Ufa, Samara and Orenburg; and beyond into Tomsk and Tobolsk, in western Siberia; and into Asiatic Turkestan. Among these daughter colonies might be mentioned *Bergthal* (1836), *Crimea* (1862), *Fürstenland* (1864), *Borsenko* (1865), *Sagradovka* (1871), *Memrik* (1885), *New Samara* (1890), *Orenburg* (1898), *Terek* (1901), *West Siberia* (1909).

### Local Government

In the management of their local affairs the Mennonites and other German colonists, were granted a large degree of local autonomy, and such political institutions as best suited their needs and desires. Each village became a governing unit for the control of schools, roads and poor relief; for the appointment of municipal herders, fire overseers, and village clerks, apportioning the arable farm lots and distributing surplus lands. At the head of each village was a magistrate called a *Schulze*, who was elected by the landowners, and had jurisdiction of petty misdemeanors. Local regulations on all these questions were passed by a town meeting composed only of those who owned land. A group of villages, at first including the whole colony, composed a district called a *Gebiet*; a superintendent called an *Oberschulze*, together with clerks and assistants, elected by the village representatives

made up the *Gebietsamt* with power of administering corporal punishment, the right to hold court, and regulate such other matters of local government as concerned the villages in common. Capital offences could be tried only in the upper Russian courts. Chortitza and Molotschna each formed a separate district or *Gebiet* at first; but later Molotschna was divided into two—Halbstadt and Gnadenfeld.

Each *Gebiet* kept its own records, made its own fire regulations, provided for an insurance fund, took care of its own delinquents as well as defectives and sick, and even made its own inheritance laws, as well as many other local regulations which among their Russian neighbors were provided for by the general imperial government. In fact the Mennonites with all their special exemptions and privileges almost constituted a democratic state within an autocratic state, enjoying local autonomy far above the native Russian communities.

The indirect supervision by the St. Petersburg government was exercised through a *Fürsorge-Komitee* usually headed by a German, stationed at Odessa, and directed by the Department of the Interior. This commission which had general supervision of all the German colonies of South Russia, was organized by the Russian Government in 1818, after several other forms of control had ended in failure. Later the Agricultural Commission in the Molotschna district was given a semi-official status with limited authority over agricultural and school matters; a similar institution was established in Chortitza. In the early seventies all these peculiar institutions were either abolished throughout the German colonies, or radically changed so as to place the colonists more directly under the control of the central government at St. Petersburg.

## Early Schools

The local autonomy granted the Mennonite colonists included control over their schools. Each village at first was free to establish such schools as it pleased, or none at all if it so desired. Compulsory public school attendance was not yet required in Russia nor anywhere else in Europe at that time. The Mennonites, however, placed an elementary school in every village from the start, of the most primitive type to be sure, but better than those of their Russian neighbors, if indeed these latter had any at all; and perhaps not behind those in many of the enlightened countries of Europe, or the pioneer communities of the United States of America.

Educational interest was not on a high plane, as compared with modern standards. Teachers were ill prepared for their work, and poorly paid. Often they were worn out old workmen, who converted their workshops into combination school and work rooms, with school desk and work bench side by side, and rod and plane both within easy reach. Sometimes the teacher was a wandering minstrel, not a native colonial, nor of the Mennonite faith, who just happened along, and claimed to know his letters. Frequently the winter teacher also functioned as the summer herdsman, thus obtaining an all-year job that enabled him to eke out a scant existence. The chief task of the schoolmaster was to hear each child recite its Scripture verse or repeat its "two times two," all memory work, and to keep order. This gave him ample time to ply his real trade, that of cabinet maker, or tailor, or shoemaker perhaps.

Progress naturally was slow. Several years were required to master the elements of the alphabet and the art of writing. With this accomplished, the school days for many were ended. Those who remained longer might learn a little ciphering, ornamental writing perhaps, and

memorize a few more Scripture verses. The primary aim of the whole system was to perpetuate the German language and to save the children for the faith of the fathers. The curriculum, therefore, consisted of the three conventional R's, with a fourth added—Religion; and some attention was also given to singing. The dominant control of the schools was nominally placed into the hands of the elders; but of effective supervision there was very little. School was usually kept in the *Grosze Stube* of some well-to-do farmer; but later, primitive school buildings, and ultimately model school houses were erected. The distinctive school furniture consisted of a long table through the center of the room, with the boys on one side, the girls on the other, and the teacher at the head; and sometimes with rough benches along the side wall for the smaller children.

The rod was freely used as an incentive to good scholarship, and when that failed other more drastic methods were often used. The teacher had little or no special preparation for his work; the medium of instruction during the early years was the everyday *Plattdeutsch*, though later High German became customary. Under such a system, of course, it was inevitable that the second generation of these Prussian immigrants should deteriorate both in their general cultural, as well as in their spiritual ideals in their new home; a price often paid by the colonists of every land in their pioneering.

## Secondary Schools

There were always a few far-sighted men in every community, however, who saw the need of keeping up higher educational standards. Among these was a group in the Molotschna settlement, who in 1820, formed a school association under the leadership of Johann Cornies for the purpose of founding a sort of continuation school



at Ohrloff, whose primary object was to train teachers for the village schools.

To the head of this *Vereinsschule*, Cornies called a trained teacher from his old home in West Prussia, by the name of Tobias Voth. This secondary school was supported by tuition fees, and was under the control of a voluntary school association. For six years Voth enrolled an increasing number of students in his advanced classes. Evening sessions and reading circles were introduced for the benefit of those who were too busy to attend during the day. Advanced Bible study and mission courses were added to the curriculum, and singing classes. But Voth was ahead of his day. Although Cornies, the president of the association, who had already shown himself somewhat of a local dictator as well as a public benefactor, seemed in a general way to be in sympathy with Voth's objectives, yet the latter's piety and deep concern for things of the spirit rather than those of the world, may have seemed a bit too idealistic for the more practical minded master farmer from Jushanlee. Besides, Voth taught only in the German language, while Cornies believed that Russian, too, should be added. At any rate, after six years of teaching, this imported schoolmaster of the Ohrloff *Vereinsschule* was dismissed. He later established a private school in the Chortitza settlement, where he continued efficient work as a teacher for many years.

In the meantime, in 1829, Voth's successor at Ohrloff was found in the person of another Prussian by the name of Heinrich Heese, a one-time clerk of the Chortitza *Gebietsamt*, a decided Russian patriot, and well-versed in the Russian language. But Heese, too, in the course of time, encountered the displeasure of the local association president. In 1842 he left Ohrloff to found a similar advanced school at Chortitza, but now called a *Zentral-*

*schule*. Several years later a third Prussian teacher, Heinrich Franz, was called to Ohrloff, where he remained until 1858. Franz was chiefly known as a strict disciplinarian and a good mathematician; and author of a mathematical textbook long used in the schools of South Russia; also a composer of a popular *Choralbuch*.

These three early pioneer teachers, all of whom had been imported from West Prussia, did much to raise the educational standards throughout the two Mennonite colonies. The early *Zentralschule*, also, just mentioned, whose distinctive aim was to provide advanced training for both the village teachers and the village and district clerks became the models for a number of later advanced schools throughout nearly every Mennonite settlement.

As just indicated, supervision of the village schools had at first been left largely to the church elders; but in 1843 in Molotschna the Agricultural Commission, under the presidency of Johann Cornies, had been granted considerable control over the school system by the Russian authorities at Odessa. This power Cornies utilized in a rather arbitrary manner during the five remaining years of his official career, but to the great improvement, nevertheless, of the educational standards of the Molotschna colony. Among the reforms he introduced were the erection of model school houses, compulsory attendance, the licensing of competent teachers, uniform textbooks, and well-planned courses of study. A little later, too, teachers' conferences were organized. By 1870 these early methods of unsatisfactory supervision were replaced by regular organized school boards. In the Chortitza colony progress followed practically similar lines.

Mennonite schools by this time were of a relatively high order, much better than those of their Russian or non-Russian neighbors; and were frequently attended by native Russians as well as by many non-Mennonite Ger-

man colonists. In the meantime, too, the educational program was expanded. More secondary schools were established, and in 1874 a special girls' school was founded in Molotschna, to be followed in later years by similar institutions in other Mennonite colonies. These girls' schools, taught usually by women teachers, were founded partly because of the desire of the Russian Government that girls and boys be taught separately in the advanced schools, but more largely because the Mennonite school authorities felt that girls needed a special type of training to best fit them for the duties of the home.

By 1881 all the German colonists in South Russia had lost many of their special school privileges; school administration after this was largely taken over by the regular Department of Education of the Russian Government. From this time until the collapse of the czarist regime in 1917, the Mennonite Boards of Education and Teachers Associations were continually engaged in a brave but losing fight with the Russian Government for control of their schools.

## RELIGIOUS LIFE

### Early Conditions

Being a religious people, the Mennonite colonists brought all their religious convictions with them from the mother country; but, as already seen, not their church organizations. They did not begin their religious life here in either of the two settlements as a united ecclesiastical body. Being, like Mennonites everywhere, congregational in their church polity, they founded independent congregational units from the start, either by villages or groups of villages, or on the basis of their Prussian Frisian, or Flemish affiliations. Frequently these ancient factions, settling in the same village, formed a

common church organization; but more frequently each settled its own village. Thus in the Old Colony, Chortitza, among other villages, became almost entirely a Flemish church congregation, while Kronsweide nearby became Frisian. In the Molotschna colony Ohrloff, Halbstadt and many others were Flemish, while Rudnerweide remained Frisian.

Sometimes whole villages came as congregational units, like Alexanderwohl in 1820 which was of the old Flemish faith, and a member of the ancient Old Groningen Society; and Gnadenfeld, in 1835, of the same faction. Not every village had a meetinghouse of its own, except where the population warranted. Thus in the Chortitza colony, in 1820, there were only two meetinghouses among the eighteen villages. Where meetinghouses were lacking, the school building might be used for religious services, or occasionally private homes. In course of time, however, each congregation, whether occupying one or more or even parts of villages, aimed to have its own church building. With the coming of the factions in the late sixties, new separate meetinghouses were erected.

Church architecture, as well as religious practises, were transplanted from the mother country and underwent little change in the new home during the first fifty years. Meetinghouses were all alike: a plain oblong wooden building, at first unpainted, with a platform along one side for the pulpit, and a long bench nearby for the *Vorsänger*, who intoned the long hymns sung without musical accompaniment. The men of the congregation sat on one side, and the women on the other; attached to one end of the building, near the pulpit, was the little *Ohmstübchen* where the numerous ministers gathered before the meeting to outline the program of

the morning service, and transact such other business as the needs of the day demanded.

Each congregation was a complete self-sufficient, independent ecclesiastical unit, with an elder, who was authorized to fulfill all ecclesiastical functions, several ministers, and a deacon or two, all chosen from the laity, without special training for their work and unsalaried; and for that reason usually selected from among the well-to-do owners of ample sized farms. Such influence as the ministry enjoyed, therefore, was due not so much to their intellectual and moral superiority as to their economic affluence, and the reverence which Mennonites have always had for their selected spiritual leaders.

Since the local civil government was also completely in the hands of the Mennonites, the ministry exerted unusual influence in the everyday affairs of the colonists, as well as in their spiritual matters, especially in the case of the village schools, which for a long time had been under their supervision. Both the Mennonite local officials as well as the Russian supervisory authorities at Odessa frequently consulted the elders in the administration of local affairs. This necessitated frequent meetings of the elders of every wing of the church, out of which grew an institution known as *Kirchen-Konvent* (Church Council) in 1850, the highest church authority in the colony.

Although the various Mennonite groups agreed on the fundamentals of Mennonitism such as non-resistance, opposition to the oath, adult baptism upon confession of faith, and theoretical religious toleration, yet in matters of religious practise there were some minor differences. In some of the Flemish churches sermons were read from a book of sermons—the preacher remaining seated; among the Frisians there was less dependence on the printed



sermons, and the preacher delivered his sermons standing. In some congregations the bread in the communion service was distributed by the elder to each communicant in his seat; in others all the participants gathered in groups around the communion table. Slight and insignificant as these age-old differences were, however, they were often sufficiently well enough entrenched in the traditions of church practises to prevent effective cooperation in much needed religious effort.

The spiritual life of the colonists through the first two generations was not of a high order. Frontier conditions are seldom conducive to the cultivation of high cultural or spiritual ideals. Educational opportunities were meager. The close affiliation of the church elders with the civil authorities in administering local government had its usual result. As in the state churches of both pre and post Reformation days, church membership was likely to become confused with the rights of citizenship; for according to their special charter of privileges, the Menonites in order to enjoy their privileges and exemptions in the empire had to be members of the organization with which the original contract had been made. Church membership, therefore, was essential to the enjoyment of highly desirable civil privileges. Membership thus came to be regarded as a matter of course, and was no longer based on actual conversion. Everybody joined church, though perhaps a little later than in the state churches which practised infant baptism.

To be sure a certain amount of ecclesiastical discipline was demanded; gross sin, and in some cases slight deviations from the established rules, were punished by excommunication. Some of the more conservative groups also added another old means of discipline in connection with excommunication, a practise called "avoidance" which, by demanding that all business and social ties as

well as religious fellowship be completely denied the unfortunate victim, practically cut him off from making a living in a tightly closed community; and was almost a sure remedy for bringing him to repentance. This gave the elders, who often exercised this power rather arbitrarily, unusual control over the economic and social well-being of the whole community as well as over the religious faith of their members. To such a victim of stern discipline, the various church divisions were often a blessing in disguise; for the power of the elder did not extend beyond the confines of his own wing of the church.

And so we have here a rare and interesting example of Mennonite self-government based on the principle of passive resistance. The experiment had its difficulties. It was not always easy to carry out the Mennonite doctrine of non-resistance and at the same time maintain the discipline necessary for a stable social order. To be sure, all major crimes were adjudicated by the larger Russian units of government; but to the Mennonite village magistrate fell the lot of administering local discipline. That there was a strong sentiment among the Mennonites in favor of maintaining their historic non-resistant principles is shown by the fact that although all the other local village offices were held by men of their own faith, that of local constable was sometimes turned over to a non-Mennonite Russian, who had no scruples against the use of force, usually some hired man or other day laborer who happened to live in the village. Differences of opinion on this matter resulted in the early twenties in one of the first native church divisions.

### *Kleine Gemeinde*

Claas Reimer, a rather sensitive soul, with a somewhat narrow religious horizon, contentious and critical in spirit, after being ordained a minister in his native

church in Danzig, migrated, in 1804, first to the Chortitza community, and later to Molotschna. He was out of step from the beginning with the rest of his fellow ministers in the Flemish church. He found fault with the laxity of their church discipline; he criticized the entire church as being too formal in its church practices and worship; and especially did he question the right of a Mennonite civil official to administer local police power over a fellow Mennonite church member. In course of time Reimer gained a few followers for his views, and stirred up so much dissension through the preaching of his doctrines that the Molotschna elder, Jacob Enns, requested the local *Gebietsamt* to silence him. Reimer appealed to the Chortitza elder, Johann Wiebe, to intercede in his behalf. The latter, however, also threatened the disturber with banishment in case he set up a separate ecclesiastical organization apart from the Mennonite body already in existence.

Paying no heed to the threats of the two elders, Reimer, with eighteen others, seceded from the main body and organized a church of their own. Although the Mennonite elders put up a strong protest against the move, the new party secured recognition from the government as a separate ecclesiastical organization with all the rights and privileges originally granted the main body of Mennonites. Other similar groups seceded at the same time throughout the different settlements. These later united with one another to form what became known as the *Kleine Gemeinde* (Little Church).

A pamphlet, published in Ohrloff in 1838 by a member of this group, justifies Reimer's withdrawal under five heads. First, it is entirely contrary to the teaching of the Saviour, and contrary to the non-resistant faith to turn a brother over to the civil authorities for punishment in case of alleged misconduct. As this practise grew

among the settlers, so says this writer, spiritual discipline grew more lax, and drinking and other vices increased. The ban was sparingly enforced against such. Second, in reply to the charge that the new party exercised too strict a church discipline for minor ecclesiastical offenses, the accusers are referred to the sixteen punishable faults recorded in II Timothy 3:1-5. They punish only such wrong-doing as the word of God commands. Third, as to the charge of disloyalty to the government "although we do not resist evil, yet we recognize a government as divinely ordained. We have never refused to be obedient to the government, but in such matters as arresting bad people, arresting them to transport them, or to accuse some one before the government, or to help to punish with money or corporal punishment, all such Jesus gave us no example for, but turned such over to the worldly government. We are not with those who would overthrow the government, for we know that it is ordained of God." Fourth, the reason for warning their people against attendance at weddings as then conducted was due to the fact that the ancient example of young Tobit was no longer followed on these occasions; but instead "there is lust of eye and of the flesh, and a high and proud spirit which is not from the Father but from the world. Although there is no direct word in the Scriptures forbidding attendance at weddings, yet it is said, we are to have no fellowship with the world. You know yourselves how the poor blind people act at these wedding feasts, the one proud, the other still prouder, the pipe in one hand, and the song book in the other as if the living God, and the dying Lord Jesus could be honored thereby. Warning against such practises can be found in the Georg Hansen confession of faith, and also in that of Hans von Steen." Fifth, they do not approve of sermons and eulogies of the dead at funeral services, a practise

which formerly was common only among Catholics and Lutherans. But recently these have been introduced among the Mennonites, the pamphlet says, and now are thoroughly entrenched among them. Even though the life of the departed one may have been evil, in order to assure the relatives of the blessedness of their loved one, the life of the deceased is highly eulogized at the grave.

On the main issue in this controversy, namely the use of force by the Mennonites against fellow Mennonites to bring about compliance with local temporal regulations, Reimer undoubtedly was right in his contention that this was inconsistent with the historic faith and practise of Mennonitism. Never before had the Mennonites been entrusted with the task of maintaining civil order in a local community through the exercise of the police power. It was a new experience for them; and they could not always square their practise with their non-resistant theory when the local magistrate found it necessary to lead a fellow Mennonite to the whipping post, or lock him up in the local jail. There was plenty of need for reform, no doubt, of the spiritual and social life in most of the churches at that time. But according to Reimer himself, the movement he inaugurated often broke the bounds of moderation, and resulted in an outbreak of fanaticism and excessive emotionalism, that was even more deplorable than the conditions it sought to remedy. Reimer, himself, however, seems to have kept his head. But his small church never grew to large dimensions. By 1860 it had nearly run its course. During the seventies the small remnant migrated bodily to Manitoba and Nebraska. A small faction, too, which had migrated from the parent body to the Crimea in the early sixties, where under the leadership of elder Jacob Wiebe they had been transformed by some additional practises even more prescribed, and a new mode of baptism, joined



the great trek to Kansas in 1874, where they have since become known as the *Krimmer Mennonite Brethren*.

### **Bernhard Fast**

During these same years, the early twenties, another troublesome controversy agitated some of the congregations in the Molotschna settlement. Elder Bernhard Fast of the Ohrloff congregation, a rather liberal minded and progressive leader, introduced a number of innovations in his religious practises which aroused the bitter opposition of the majority of his conservative membership. Three-fourths of his congregation, some four hundred families, withdrew and organized a congregation of their own which, because it embraced the larger part of the membership, became known as the *Grosze Gemeinde*, but among themselves familiarly spoken of as the "Pure Flemish." Among the innovations to which objections were raised were the ordination of Elder Fast, by a neighboring Frisian elder, rather than by one of his own wing of the church; the admission of a non-Mennonite missionary to the communion table; the founding of the Ohrloff *Vereinsschule*; and the organization of a Bible society, a branch of the St. Petersburg society whose chief function was the distribution of free Bibles. One of the charges against this Bible society was that the titles of its officers, president and secretary, had a militaristic sound; although in reality, as the chairman of the *Fürsorge-Komitee* remarked, there was no more connection between these titles and militarism than between his snuff box and the moon.

In the beginning of this controversy, Fast had the sympathy and cooperation of Elder Franz Goertz of the Frisian Rudnerweide congregation, and of Elder Peter Wedel of the extremely conservative Old Flemish, though

spiritually wide awake Alexanderwohl group. Some years later Elder Fast, because of certain political activities, lost most of the support of these two congregations. The Pure Flemish seceders, later known as the Lichtenau-Petershagen group of churches, remained quite conservative in all their religious practises, while the Ohrloff church became the center of the religious and cultural life of the whole Molotschna community. Long before the close of the past century, however, all these religious differences had been ironed out.

### **New Life and New Light**

Before the Mennonites migrated to Russia they had undergone some influences which formed the basis for some of their cultural and religious developments and divisions. These influences—fostered by new arrivals—can be enumerated as follows.

Even in Prussia the Mennonites had been in contact with the Moravian brethren of Saxony (*Herrnhuter Brüdergemeinde*), the pioneers of modern evangelism, missions, and the emphasis on a personal experience of conversion. Similar influences had been exerted through Anglo-Saxon revivalism as represented by the Baptists who reached Prussia, Poland, and Russia during the beginning of the nineteenth century. A third source was the pietism of Württemberg in South Germany which reached the Mennonite settlements in South Russia through Eduard Wüst and others by the middle of the past century. All of these movements emphasized a spontaneous personal experience of salvation and had a sense of evangelism and missionary zeal which was expressed in one's immediate family and neighborhood in opposition to the set and established practises and beliefs of the orthodox Lutherans, Reformed, and even Mennonites. The followers of the new movement were open to

new methods to promote and express their religious and cultural life, were willing to accept new values, and had a zeal and desire to spread them once they were accepted. These are some of the seeds which were transplanted to the steppes of Russia where they bore fruit among the Lutheran, Reformed, and Mennonite settlers as well as the general Russian population. Those emphasizing this "new gospel" to the exclusion of some of the typical Mennonite characteristics separated themselves and organized new church bodies, the most outstanding being the Mennonite Brethren.

It is interesting to note, in this connection, that Mennonite beliefs and practises were challenged by this pietistic-revivalistic movement during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in The Netherlands, in North and South Germany, Prussia, and America. It did not always result in a break within the fold—differences were often adjusted. But among the American Mennonites of Pennsylvania German background numerous divisions occurred. One of them, led by John Oberholtzer, resulted in the founding of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America in 1860, the same year that the Mennonite Brethren organized. Both emphasized a quickened personal Christian life and newer methods in promoting the Christian cause. It was this Conference which the Mennonites coming from Russia—from whom the Mennonite Brethren had recently seceded—joined after they had come to America in 1874. This seems to indicate that the differences between the Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren—even in the earlier days—were not as great and basic as may sometimes appear.

### **Beginning of Mennonite Brethren**

The Gnadenfeld congregation of the Molotschna settlement had been the headquarters of a vital, pietistic

Christianity since its founding. Here for some years Bible study, prayer meetings, missionary festivals and temperance activities were practised.

Here was located, also, an advanced *Bruderschule* which for a time, under the direction of Johann Lange, a teacher trained in Germany, exerted considerable influence upon the cultural and religious life of the community, not always, however, of the most wholesome sort. In the neighboring German Evangelical colony, too, labored an evangelical pietist, Eduard Wüst by name, a sort of John Wesley, well-known among the various Protestant German colonies of South Russia. Pastor Wüst was a fiery preacher, stressing wherever he went especially the free grace of God as a means of eternal salvation, and the need of a greater sin-consciousness, and a more vital religious experience among church members than prevailed generally among both the Mennonites and Lutherans of that day. This evangelical preacher frequently visited the Gnadenfeld mission festivals and prayer meetings. Partly through his influence, a small group of laymen from several villages about Gnadenfeld, desirous of a more emotional type of religious life, and protesting against what they regarded as the spiritual lifelessness then prevalent among many of the churches of the time, began to meet as a small prayer group in private houses. At one of these meetings at Elisabeththal in January 1860, after vainly asking Elder Lenzmann to administer the communion to them as a special group, and at a time other than the regular date set for this rite, they observed the ceremony by themselves without the elder's assistance and against his advice.

This bold and revolutionary step, of course, immediately arrested the attention of the church elders. Communion, according to the traditional practises of the church, could be administered only by an elder, never

even by a mere minister, to say nothing about an ordinary layman. At the same time this group of eighteen men, without a preacher among them, drew up a document in which they stated their reasons for desiring to withdraw from the main body; this they presented to the elders. Among these reasons were—

The religious decay of the entire Mennonite brotherhood, and on account of the Lord's will and our conscience we can no longer fellowship with you as a church. For we fear that God's judgment is inevitable, since the prevailing godlessness crieth unto heaven. Besides we are fearful lest the government repeal the special privileges granted to the Mennonites on account of their open transgressions. It is sad to behold on market days how the Mennonites carry on such a frivolous life, in which even ministers take part.

This charge made by these concerned men that the whole church was spiritually dead, and no longer fit to function as a soul-saving institution, of course, did not soften the determination of the majority of the elders to stop the secession movement, which, if allowed to proceed unhindered, might endanger the unity of the whole denomination, and might even threaten their special privileges enjoyed under the government. But opposition had the usual result. It in turn strengthened the convictions of the small band, and their numbers increased. In the meantime a similar movement for a more vital spiritual life based on a more real religious experience had also arisen in the Chortitza colony, though perhaps from not quite the same source. In almost every congregation throughout both colonies there were a few disturbed souls who joined the new following. Gradually throughout the year 1860, in spite of the strenuous opposition of the elders, the movement crystallized into a new and separate church organization.



## Baptist Influence

If the old church was spiritually dead, then of course, the baptism by which members had been admitted into its fellowship was not valid. Soon the new body demanded that recruits from the old church be admitted into the new only by rebaptism. A little later in the year some one questioned whether the traditional Mennonite method of baptism by pouring was scriptural. The decision was in the negative, and immersion was adopted as the prevailing method. At the same time ministers and elders were elected; and before the year had passed, a new church had been completely organized and had begun a vigorous campaign for recruits.

No doubt this question arose from contact with the Baptists. Baptist literature, in which baptism by immersion was promoted, was circulated among the Mennonites of Prussia at the time when the Molotschna settlement of the Ukraine was being established. Not long after this question had been raised among the Brethren the predominant mode of baptism became immersing backward. In this connection it should be mentioned that this form of baptism had occasionally been practised among the Anabaptists during the sixteenth century and later in Holland and northwest Germany.

The Baptist pioneer of Germany, J. G. Oncken, visited the Mennonite Brethren in Russia repeatedly and influenced them. Among other things, the Mennonite Brethren adopted the Baptist hymn book, *Glaubensstimme*, with the lighter English melodies.

These Baptist influences and contacts were also found in other areas of expression, such as missions, literature, etc., and were transplanted to America where they are still in evidence. Thus the Baptists who originated in Holland and England, partly under the influence

of the early Anabaptists, later affected the development of this branch of the Mennonites.

In the main, the new body did not deviate far from the fundamentals of Mennonite doctrine. They stressed especially, however, the emotional side of the religious life; and insisted that conversion was a very definite experience, marking a decided turning point in one's whole spiritual existence; and was not the result of a gradual and evolutionary growth through the medium of catechetical instruction as practised by the main body of Mennonites. Religious depth was inclined to be measured by the intensity of definite emotional experiences.

Before the founding of the Mennonite Brethren group, some members of the Lutheran congregation of Wüst had begun to express their joy of salvation in excessive forms such as shouting, jumping, and the use of musical instruments. Some of the Mennonite Brethren also came under this influence. However, this was soon officially denounced and more wholesome forms of expressing religious experiences prevailed.

In the early years, in common with other similar movements advocating a freer and more spontaneous expression of their newly-found liberty under the free grace of God, and under the stress of deep emotions, which was often whipped up to a high pitch, the new body made much of enjoying their spiritual freedom.

### **Opposition and Sympathy**

The new group insisted that they were still followers of Menno Simons. The old church, not they, had departed from the true faith, they said. They were the real Mennonites. This insistence that they be still regarded as Mennonites, was due to the fact that the peculiar privileges enjoyed by the Mennonites were granted by the Russian government to Mennonites as a

special body. Under any other name the new group would likely forfeit these privileges; consequently they clung to the name and many of the fundamental doctrines of the original Mennonite body. They finally assumed the official name of *Mennoniten Brüder Gemeinde*; and fastened upon the old church from which they had withdrawn the title *Kirchliche Mennoniten*, perhaps, because, like the state church, the latter assumed somewhat of a "churchly" attitude in their religious practises.

This assumption of religious superiority did not make for congenial relations between the old church and the new. During the first decade of the controversy, in the sixties, the two factions carried on one of the most unlovely religious feuds in all Mennonite history. The majority of the elders in the old church, regarding many of the revolutionary practises of the new group as a menace to the traditional beliefs of the Mennonite faith, and fearful lest dissension within their ranks might furnish the Russian government an excuse for cancelling their special privileges, went to unjustifiable lengths, nevertheless, in trying to prevent the dissenters from gaining official government consent for organizing a new church in which they might practise the kind of religious life which their consciences demanded. The fact that the "Brethren" had already withdrawn from the old church did not prevent the elders of the latter from expelling them; and applying in some cases the doctrine of avoidance, which because of its denial of all economic intercourse between the excommunicated and his former brethren, resulted in complete economic ruin of the one expelled.

After exhausting all the ecclesiastical means of discipline without success, the elders turned to the civil authorities, the *Gebietsamt*, whose Mennonite officials for the most part were equally opposed to the formation

of a new religious organization. The Agricultural Commission, too, joined the other governmental agencies in the protest. Even the non-Mennonite *Fürsorge-Komitee* at Odessa shared the views of the other authorities. But all to no avail. Religious conviction thrives on opposition. Although the leaders were threatened with Siberia by these various agencies if they persisted in carrying out their intentions, and some were actually imprisoned for a time, while others had suffered economic ruin, yet the movement made continued though slow progress.

Not all those whose lives had been quickened and revived through the above mentioned influences felt that they had to leave the Mennonite brotherhood and join the Mennonite Brethren. On the contrary, the majority of leaders felt compelled to let their light shine where they were. Among those were the elders Bernhard Harder, Leonhard Sudermann, August Lenzmann, and others, some of whom had been personal friends of Wüst. These were the ones who defended the seceding Mennonite Brethren when they were accused and persecuted by others and were willing to give them spiritual guidance. They were also the ones who channeled the best of this movement into the brotherhood as a whole.

### Recognition and Development

In the meantime, the Molotschna Brethren had sent one of their number, Johann Claassen, to the imperial court at St. Petersburg to intercede in their behalf with the central government. After a stay of several years, Claassen finally secured official recognition for the organization of a new church without the sacrifice of their special privileges as Mennonites. At the same time, too, in 1862, he had received a land concession under favorable conditions for a new settlement along the Kuban River, in the upper Caucasus. Soon after, two Brethren settle-

ments were started here, from both the mother colonies, where for some years they endured serious economic hardships, but were free to practise their religion unmolested. In 1872 the Kuban church had a membership of one hundred and fifty, which by 1914 had increased to a total population of fifteen hundred. Some years later Claassen was granted a gold medal by the Russian Government, not for his services in founding a new religious body, but for his services as a colonizer of a new frontier settlement. Not all of the Mennonite Brethren of course moved to the Kuban at this time; many remained in the old colonies.

This serious controversy just described was not exclusively a religious one. It had somewhat of an economic basis as well. This was just the time, it will be remembered, of the struggle between the landless and the landowners. Most of the settlers in the Kuban colony were from the former class; Claassen also was of this group. Mennonite Brethren were the most numerous contingent in many of the newer colonies founded after this and among the poorer in the old colonies. Economics and religion even here could not be entirely divorced.

## Contributions

The Mennonite Brethren originated in Russia as a result of influences from abroad. They maintained a lively contact with the Baptists and other pietistic movements of Germany, supporting their missions, reading their literature and later even sending their young men to the Baptist Theological Seminary, at Hamburg. This stimulating influence from abroad in the culturally isolated settlements of Russia resulted in the Mennonite Brethren becoming pioneers in a number of areas: evangelism, missions, Sunday school work, publication enter-



prises, the introduction of gospel songs (*Glaubensstimme*), etc. Not that the Mennonite brotherhood as a whole did not engage in these activities, but the Molotschna Mennonite Brethren especially, considering their small number, made outstanding contributions in these fields. This is not equally true of the Chortitza Mennonite Brethren and those who came to America in 1874.

Some of the outstanding Mennonite leaders and educators of the crucial decades of the early twentieth century in Russia were of Mennonite Brethren background. Among them were men like P. M. Friesen (educator and historian), Jakob and Abraham Kroeker (writers), Heinrich Braun (publisher), Peter Braun (educator), B. H. Unruh (educator), A. H. Unruh, (educator) and others. The spiritual horizon and the field of labor of some of them, however, was widened to such a degree that they reached far beyond their original background. Nevertheless, their early stimulation was received in that group. Jakob Kroeker, who died in 1948 in Germany, was the most prolific Bible expositor that the Mennonites have produced. His many volumes on the Old Testament have been published in many editions.

By way of summary it can be stated that the Mennonite Brethren made a contribution by breaking certain forms of religious and cultural life which in some cases had become a hindrance to a wholesome Christian life and by replacing these with new forms and new life. At the same time this weakened the Mennonite heritage and resulted in the disintegration of the then established Mennonite way of life. It seems there is seldom a gain without some loss; it is usually an exchange of values or a shift of emphasis.

## Jerusalem Friends

At the same time that the Mennonite Brethren organized, another religious disturbance developed in the community of Gnadenfeld, Molotschna. *Jerusalem Friends*, or *Templers*, as they came later to be called, were a group of religious enthusiasts originally found in Württemberg, Germany, followers of a theologian by the name of Christoph Hoffmann, who sponsored a kind of zionist movement, the chief objective of which was to build a new temple at Jerusalem. Theologically, the new cult was a strange compound of pietism, missionary zeal and rationalistic thinking. In 1861, Johann Lange, a former student at one of their training schools in Württemberg, was installed as head of the *Bruderschule* at Gnadenfeld, by the trustees of that institution.

Being an ardent follower of the Jerusalem Friends ideas, Lange soon found fault with the traditional beliefs of the Gnadenfeld Mennonites; and in special meetings for both children and adults held in the school building taught the new doctrines. In the course of a few years he secured a small following among some of the school supporters in both Gnadenfeld and surrounding villages; but at the same time aroused the bitter opposition of a majority of the Gnadenfeld membership, and especially the officials of the church. Most of Lange's followers, including Johann himself, were of the landless class. After a bitter controversy lasting several years, during which Lange spent some time in jail, the head of the *Bruderschule* was forced to resign. Together with a goodly number of his followers, he too, founded in the Caucasus, in 1866, a settlement and church congregation, named *Tempelhof*, not far from the Mennonite Brethren community already described. Some of them ultimately located in Palestine.

## Peters Brethren

To complete the story of Gnadenfeld's contribution to the religious life of the Russian Mennonites during this period, mention should be made of another small group, the *Peters Brethren*, followers of one Hermann Peters, an unlettered farmer, who found the true church based on a literal interpretation of numerous apostolic injunctions, meant to meet the needs of the apostolic times. Because Christ broke the bread at the first communion service, Peters insisted the bread must be broken, and not passed to the communicant in small pieces already cut, as was the usual Mennonite custom; for which reason his followers were sometimes called *Breadbreakers*. Minute regulations were laid down for every detail of everyday living. Men were forbidden to wear neckties, watch chains, starched shirts, and polished boots. Women were not to wear ear rings, gay clothes, laces, or jewelry of any kind. Forbidden, also, were the reading of newspapers, discussion of political questions, the use of tobacco or strong drink. Children were not to attend the public schools, nor to greet strangers with the usual "good day," but were to pass silently by. When entering a home, brethren were to say "Peace be unto you"; but when entering the house of a stranger they must say "May it be well with you." This smaller group had little influence upon the religious life of the Mennonite body as a whole. They have since disappeared from the older settlements, but a few are still found near Fairview, Oklahoma, U.S.A.

## Mennonite Alliance Church

In 1905 a new group arose which attempted to reconcile some of the divergent practises among the existing Mennonite groups. The new movement emphasized a

strong spiritual life with great interest in evangelism and mission activities and attempted to retain the best of the Mennonite heritage.

This movement, originating in Lichtfelde, Molotschna, in 1905, and Altona, Sagradovka, in 1907, desired to have fellowship in the Lord's Supper with Christians even beyond the Mennonite brotherhood. They also emphasized the need for stricter church discipline. They practiced immersion but accepted members who had not been baptized according to this form. This group was known as the *Evangelische Mennoniten-Gemeinde* or *Allianz-Gemeinde*. Although not historically of direct relation, this group is spiritually related to the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren of the prairie states and provinces in America. After World War I, Mennonite immigrants from Russia transplanted this group to Canada and South America.

## MIGRATIONS TO AMERICA AND ASIA

The special privileges enjoyed by the Mennonites and the other German colonists of South Russia set them apart, as we have already observed as a distinct group within the empire, really a state within a state, separated from the native Russians by social and political as well as religious barriers; but at the same time held together firmly as a group by ties of language, religion, racial pride and a sense of superior culture. It can readily be seen that this was an anomalous situation, that could not last forever. It was only under the dominion of an autocratic czar that discriminations such as these in favor of a foreign population was at all possible. Under the growing democracy of the time it was becoming increasingly difficult to grant favors to a minority above those enjoyed by the citizenry in general.

The growing nationalism of middle Europe during the

sixties, evidenced specifically in the revolt of the Polish Russians in 1863, the emergence of Prussian militarism, the ambitious designs against the Turkish empire—all these conspired to convince the Russian “Slavophiles” that the day for Russianizing all Russia had come.

The blow fell in 1870. An imperial *ukase* proclaimed that the day of special privileges had ended for the German colonists. The *Fürsorge-Komitee* at Odessa was to be abolished, and the colonists were to be governed directly from St. Petersburg; Russian was to be the official language in the local *Gebietsamt*, and was to be introduced as a subject of study in all the schools; all the German schools were to be supervised directly by the imperial educational authorities; and worst of all for the Mennonites, military exemption was to be abolished. The colonists were to be given ten years in which to accommodate themselves to the new order. After that they would become full-fledged Russian citizens with no special favors.

### **Mennonites in St. Petersburg**

To the Mennonites, who had every reason to believe up to this time that the promises made by Empress Catherine had been granted in perpetuity, this threat to end their exemptions from war service came as a distinct shock. They immediately took such steps as they could to protect their former privileges. At a meeting held at Alexanderwohl, in midwinter of 1871, of delegates from the Molotschna, Chortitza and Bergthal colonies, they elected a delegation to visit the imperial city, and present the czar with a petition in which they stated their historic peace principles, and plead that the promises with which they were induced to settle the steppes of South Russia might not be abrogated. This delegation under



the leadership of Elder Sudermann of Berdiansk, and Elder Dyck of the Chortitza colony, neither of whom unfortunately could speak Russian, arriving in St. Petersburg later in the winter, did not succeed in having a personal audience with the czar as they had hoped; but through the good offices of the president of the Odessa *Fürsorge-Komitee*, who happened to be in the city at the time, they were able to meet several ministers of the imperial council, and the chairman of the special commission that had been appointed to draft the new military laws.

Although neither the ministers, nor Count Heyden of the special commission could give the Mennonites any definite or detailed information as to the exact nature of the forthcoming laws, all of them assured the elders, nevertheless, that they would not likely be granted complete exemption, but might be assigned to some sort of non-combatant service in the hospital or sanitary departments. If Mennonites were completely exempted, said Count Heyden, then all the Russians would want to be Mennonites. Assured by Elder Sudermann that even non-combatant service under the War Department would not be acceptable to the Mennonites, the count replied that if everybody were like Mennonites in this respect stable government would be impossible, since it would soon be overrun by its enemies. Deputy Epp of Chortitza answered that if all were like the Mennonites there would be no need for defense against enemies since there would be no enemies, to which the count had to agree.

In the course of the interview one of the deputies suggested that perhaps a money payment might be substituted for non-combatant service, to which the minister replied that such an arrangement would not be possible. Buying military exemption with money was a common Mennonite practise running back through their Prussian and Dutch history. It would hardly seem consistent, how-

ever, to refuse hospital service on the one hand and yet be willing to secure freedom from all military obligations by the payment of money which could be directly used for the promotion of war activities. But Mennonites were not always logical or consistent in their attempt to reconcile their heavenly with their earthly citizenship. This first attempt of the Mennonite delegation to get a favorable hearing before the St. Petersburg authorities was not very satisfactory. The fact that neither of the two chief spokesmen, Sudermann and Dyck, could speak the language of the country did not make a good impression with the ministry; and the details of the new law had not yet been worked out. The delegates returned home without any assurance as to their future; but with a growing conviction that their privileged days were numbered.

Still hoping that a personal appeal to the czar himself, the *Landesvater*, might ward off the threatened loss of their privileged status, the churches sent a second delegation the next year to attempt a meeting with him, but again without success. They did have an audience with the Crown Prince Constantin, however, who reminded them, in German, of the visit he had made to the Mennonite colonies some years before. But he, too, assured the delegation that while every effort would be made in the forthcoming law to meet the religious scruples of the Mennonites, yet they would be compelled to perform some sort of non-combatant service in the new arrangement. This second delegation, too, returned home greatly disappointed, more convinced than ever that emigration now was inevitable for all such Mennonites as insisted upon the unconditional preservation of their former liberties. Several later delegations were sent to St. Petersburg during 1873, but to no avail. By 1874 the new law had been formulated, providing non-combatant service for

the Mennonites—forestry service, or industrial work not connected with the War Department in times of peace; and hospital service in times of war.

### Delegation to America

In the meantime, as the hope of securing favorable consideration from the government faded, the sentiment for emigration to a foreign land increased. Various countries where there was still a demand for new settlers were considered—Russian Turkestan, and even the distant Amur region, both of which had recently been added to Russia, but in neither of which the military laws would be applied; New Zealand; and North and South America. Very little was known of any of these countries. In the words of Leonhard Sudermann, one of the staunchest supporters of the emigration movement to America, "To many, America meant a country interesting for the adventurer, an asylum for convicts. How could one live in peace under his vine and fig tree amid such people." "Such a life," he continues, "might be possible for those who had their pockets full of revolvers, but for a non-resistant people it would be impossible to found homes amid such surroundings."

The same ignorance of the new world evidently prevailed among all the Mennonites and other German colonists, who were also contemplating a large emigration movement, if the following rhyme, seemingly composed by a Volhynian Swiss rhymester expresses the popular sentiment among them.

*Doch ober wo ist Amerika?*

*Ich han schon ofter hara saa*

*Es ist dort dribbe ungefär*

*Bei vierzig Meil vom grosse Meer.*

*Die Leena meent, Sie wees davon*

*"Es is net weit von Oregon"*  
*Die Marie saat, "Ich denk beinah*  
*Es is in Pennsylvania"*  
*Jetzt kommt derzu die alte Lis'*  
*Sie lacht und meent "Es is net so,*  
*Es is in alt New Mexico."*  
*Der Michael hat das net gelitt*  
*Das sich die Weiber hen gestritt,*  
*"Ich wees es fescht, Ich kann eich saa*  
*S'isch dribbe in Amerika."*

Among the men most active in the emigration movement were two Mennonites from the Berdiansk congregation, Elder Leonhard Sudermann, and Cornelius Jansen, the latter a prosperous grain merchant of that growing seaport. Jansen especially, who had come to Russia from Prussia as a young man, and had never given up his Prussian citizenship, and who because he had served as Prussian consul at Berdiansk for some years, was for that reason in closer touch with world affairs than his country brethren, saw from the start that emigration would be the inevitable fate of such Mennonites as would not accept some sort of war service. As early as 1870 he wrote to Christian Krehbiel, John F. Funk, editor of the *Herald of Truth*, and Jacob Y. Schantz, and others of whom he had heard, asking for detailed information about the military laws, natural resources, land laws, especially of the western states, and such other matters as might be of interest to prospective settlers with a tender conscience on the question of war. This correspondence he later printed and distributed among the Russian Mennonites.

### **Contacting British Officials**

At the same time, too, former consul Jansen inquired of the British consul at Berdiansk as to the possibility of military exemption in Canada, and also as to the availability of large tracts of land suitable for large compact

settlements. This inquiry led to a series of interesting letters written back and forth among various British and Canadian government officials—the British foreign office, the British ambassador at St. Petersburg, the governor general at Ottawa, the Canadian Department of Agriculture, and numerous lesser officials. The prospect of securing some fifty thousand industrious farmers for the unsettled prairies of western Canada aroused keen interest among the Canadian authorities, who soon began an active campaign to direct the proposed emigration to their country. The Ottawa government dispatched a special commissioner, William Hespeler, to South Russia for the purpose of interesting the Mennonites in Canada. Some of this correspondence is interesting, and is worthy of brief mention here.

The British consul at Berdiansk, writing to Earl Granville of the foreign office in London in 1872, speaking highly of the Russian Mennonites, said,

Seven years residence in this country has enabled me to acquire a good knowledge of them, and I am personally acquainted with many of the elders. I feel no hesitation, therefore, in saying that these Germans would prove a valuable acquisition to any country they may select for their home. If they find difficulty in proceeding to Canada, they will seek refuge in the United States to which country their attention has already been directed, but as I have already stated their first choice falls on British soil, and though their determination to quit this country is fixed, yet from what I can learn they will do so with regret if they have to leave for any other country than Canada."

A little later the British ambassador to Russia, writing from St. Petersburg to the foreign office in London in answer to an inquiry whether the imperial government would object to the emigration of the Mennonites, said that Prince Gortschagov, the foreign minister in the government of Alexander II, and his greatest diplomat, sug-



gested that the imperial government would lay no obstacle in the way of their departure if they first fulfilled all their obligations according to law. The letter further continued,

On referring to the new military system imposed on all Russian subjects without exception which is the principal cause of these colonists emigrating from Russia, Prince Gortschagov observed that he had voted in the council of the empire against the withdrawal of the privileges and the exemption from military service formerly granted these colonists, on the principle that the promises made by the sovereign of that day should be held sacred. In this opinion the emperor had participated, but the great majority of the council had voted in a contrary sense.

September 17, 1872, John Lowe, of the Department of Agriculture at Ottawa suggested to William Hespeler, now touring the Mennonite settlements of South Russia, that he make arrangements with some influential Mennonite to act as agent of the Dominion, to be reimbursed at the rate of two dollars per capita for all the Mennonites settling in Canada. To which Hespeler soon answered, insisting that the two dollar subsidy would be a serious mistake for,

it would not create a very favorable effect, neither would the agency be accepted by any of the Mennonites, as according to my experience of them, I find them more conscientious than their confessionalists in Canada or the United States—it would in their eyes look too much like dealing in human beings. They are not a people like the general run of emigrants—they are a reasoning, thinking, cautious, and to a large extent an educated people.

So anxious were the Canadian authorities to secure these prospective Mennonite settlers that they authorized Hespeler to grant them all their demands—exemption from military service, free land—160 acres to each head of a family, reserved in large compact areas in Manitoba, freedom of religion, their own German language, control

of their own schools—practically all the privileges which had been granted them by Catherine in 1787. Hespeler, however, because he was suspected by the Russian police of fomenting a mass emigration movement, was forced to leave Russia. Cornelius Jansen was also exiled in 1873 for the same reason.

At the time Jansen started his investigation of Canadian possibilities through the British consul at Berdiansk in 1871, he also made similar inquiries concerning the United States from the American consul at the same port. The American Government, however, at this time did not seem interested in the proposed migration, although in 1874 after the movement had actually begun, the United States Senate debated for over a week a bill to grant Mennonites a large compact tract of western lands, but without result. Railroad companies, together with state land departments, took a lively interest, however, in the possibility of getting industrious farmers for their unsettled lands. The Santa Fe Company in 1875, sent a special agent, C. B. Schmidt, to South Russia to bring as many Mennonites as possible to their railroad lands in Kansas. Kansas received the bulk of this immigration to the United States.

### **Investigating America**

Meanwhile, by this time great interest had been aroused among the Russian Mennonites in the emigration cause through the efforts of Hespeler, and the conviction among the leaders that nothing favorable could be expected from St. Petersburg. Following Hespeler's suggestion, various congregations from the different sections of the Mennonite population selected a delegation to visit America on a tour of investigation. This delegation consisted of twelve men—Elder Jacob Buller of the Alexanderwohl congregation, and Leonhard Sudermann of

Berdiansk, representing the Molotschna colony; Elder Tobias Unruh from the Volhynia settlements; a layman, Andreas Schrag, speaking for the Swiss congregations of the same province; minister Heinrich Wiebe, and *Oberschulze* Jacob Peters, together with Cornelius Buhr, the latter on his own expense, representing the Bergthal colony; Elder Wilhelm Ewert, of the West Prussian Mennonites; Elder Cornelius Toews and David Claassen, sent by the *Kleine Gemeinde*; and the two Tschetter brothers, Paul and Lorenz, from the Hutterite settlements.

This delegation, in the summer of 1873, visited what was then the frontier line in America of cheap lands, from Winnipeg through Minnesota, Dakota, Nebraska and Kansas, carefully investigating soil and climate, and available satisfactory lands; and inquiring about political conditions and military regulations. As already suggested, the Dominion of Canada granted most liberal inducements to prospective settlers.

Neither the national government in the United States nor any of the states could offer terms similar to those of Canada, although later three of the western states passed legislation exempting Mennonites from militia duty. The Hutterite contingent of the delegation in a visit with President Grant in which they asked for a guarantee of military exemption from the national government, were informed by the president that he could make no such promise; but he expressed the opinion that it was not likely that any one in the United States would ever be called upon to serve in the army contrary to his religious convictions. The president, however, was favorably disposed toward the emigration movement, and recommended favorable land legislation in his message to Congress.

The delegation of twelve returned to Russia late in the summer—the more conservative Chortitza, Bergthal, and *Kleine Gemeinde* delegates to recommend Canada

to their brethren; and the more liberal Molotschna representatives as well as the Hutterites to recommend the United States, in spite of the fact that the guarantees of military exemption from the government of the latter were less definite than those of the Canadian Government.

Large numbers of eager Mennonites throughout all the settlements were impatiently awaiting the return of the delegates, ready if the reports were favorable, to start immediately on the big trek to the promised land. In fact, several small groups had already left for America. But the mass migration did not begin until after the prospective immigrants had heard from their deputies. The enthusiastic reports brought back from the new world that there was plenty of good land for everybody to be had almost for the asking, and with a promise of absolute military exemption in Canada, and a fair degree of certainty that war service would never be demanded in the United States, aroused great eagerness for emigration throughout all the colonies in the years 1873 and '74. In those centers where the emigration fever ran highest, steps were immediately taken by many to dispose of their property with a view to an early departure the following spring. But it was soon found that this was not always an easy matter, especially in such compact settlements like Alexanderwohl, Bergthal, and others where whole congregations and colonies had decided to emigrate en-masse.

### **Momentous Decisions**

Everybody wanted to sell, and there was nobody to buy. To make matters worse, in many of the settlements, Mennonites were living on crown lands in which they had only a limited ownership of the soil. It was only the use of it that they had a right to sell; and even that could be transferred only to fellow Mennonites accord-

ing to the original contract made with the government. Buildings and improvements, of course, belonged to the individual farmer; but without land, buildings were not of great value. The marketability of land, therefore, in the Mennonite colonies was greatly restricted; and during the first few years of the emigration movement, well-improved farms sold for far less than their real value. Some years later the government permitted the outright sale of land, but by this time the non-Mennonite buyers, frequently took advantage of the oversupply of farms for sale, and continued to purchase them at only a fraction of their real worth. In spite of these discouragements, nevertheless, whole villages and congregations continued their preparations for the long journey throughout the spring and summer of 1874.

The next task was to secure the necessary passports permitting departure from the country. This, too, was frequently a long drawn out process, demanding heavy fees, and accelerated only by liberal gratuities to corrupt government officials. Sometimes it was months after requests had been sent in for passports before they were available; and every step was attended with heavy expense.

### **Envoy of the Czar**

By this time the government officials in St. Petersburg, realizing that there was strong likelihood of losing some forty thousand of the czar's most industrious farmers in South Russia, began to consider means of stemming the emigration tide. To this end the czar sent Adjutant General von Totleben, himself a German Lutheran, a Crimean War hero well-known among the German colonists, through the Mennonite communities offering those who would remain, certain exemptions from the most objectionable features of the new military law. He met



the Mennonite civil and religious leaders in the month of May, 1874, at Halbstadt, Chortitza, and Alexanderwohl, where he informed them that he was authorized by the czar to offer them some sort of civil service as a substitute for the compulsory military duty required in the proposed conscription act. At the same time Totleben tried to discourage the emigration movement by painting America in its darkest colors. In America, he said, the pioneer settlers would be compelled to spend much of their time and labor in draining swamps and cutting down the forests before the land would be fit for cultivation. Since labor was scarce in the new country, the settlers would be under the necessity of doing all this work themselves, whereas in Russia such work was performed by cheap native labor. As for military exemption in America, the Mennonites were not exempted in the Southern States during the Civil War; and as for the North, where they proposed to settle, it seemed altogether likely at that time, that war was inevitable with England, in which case, no doubt, they would be called upon for service with all others, so said the general.

This visit of Totleben's, with his promise to substitute civil service disconnected from the army organization, no doubt influenced many of the more liberal minded Mennonites to reconsider their earlier determination to leave Russian soil. Both in Chortitza, and in Halbstadt the majority of the leaders present at these meetings with the general, wrote him a letter of thanks after his departure, with expressions of gratitude for his kindly visit; and of entire satisfaction with the substitute service offered; at the same time uttering the hope nevertheless, that they might be left in entire control of their school system, which it was rumored was to be placed under government control under the new Russianization program. These promises were later enacted into law providing that the

Mennonites were to be exempt from military service, in lieu of which they were to be assigned to duty in hospitals, factories, or especially in forestry service, where they were to be permitted to work in compact and exclusive groups. These concessions were to apply in times of war as well as in times of peace; but were offered only to the original Mennonite settlers in Russia and their descendants. Immigrants coming into Russia, or outside accessions coming into the church after the passing of the law, were not to be included.

While the majority seemed satisfied with these rather liberal concessions, there was a strong minority, nevertheless who believed that any service under the guise of military law would be a violation of their peace principles. These still preferred emigration to any compromise with their consciences. In the words of Elder Isaac Peters, one of the staunchest defenders of this position, and exiled in midwinter because of his activities demanding absolute exemption, the government by keeping the substitute service under the control of the military department, and by limiting forestry service to a period of twenty years was keeping the back door open for entrance later into full military service.

Many of those, therefore, sharing these views, including entire villages, continued their preparations for departure. These included in the main the more conservative groups, such as the daughter colonies of the Chortitza settlement—Bergthal and Fürstenland; the Alexanderwohl congregation; the Swiss of Volhynia; the Hutterites; and the *Kleine Gemeinde* colony at Borsenko. These emigrated bodily; but from every settlement and almost from every village there were some additions to the mass movement.

The military question, of course, was not the only issue involved in this exodus. This is proven by the

fact that not only Mennonites, but German Lutherans, and Catholics as well, though to a much smaller degree, none of whom shared the Mennonite peace principles, had also decided to leave their adopted country for America during this time. The program of Russianization which the government had adopted would ultimately deprive all these privileged colonies of the highly-favored status which they had enjoyed heretofore, such as exclusive control of their schools, the use of their German language, and a large degree of local political autonomy under the *Fürsorge-Komitee* at Odessa. This commission was now to be abolished; the schools to be placed under the direct control of the Russian Government; and the Russian language to be taught side by side with the favored German. To the Mennonites, especially, there seemed to be a close relation between their distinctive Mennonitism and their *Deutschtum*. It was a matter of grave doubt to many of them whether they could maintain their traditional religious principles separated from their German tongue and culture. Then, too, in every colony, there were those who decided to cast their lot with the religious absolutists for economic reasons. In every westward movement in history there has been a large contingent of the landless. And they were not absent here. Many motives lay back of the emigration movement.

### The Great Trek

Among the first of the small groups to leave in the spring of 1874 was an advance guard of ten families from the Swiss congregations in Volhynia under the leadership of Andreas Schrag, one of the delegates of the year before. Several West Prussians with Elder Wilhelm Ewert left Prussia about the same time. Some thirty families from Crimea, the entire congregation under their elder, Jacob Wiebe, breaking up their homes on May 30th, and cross-

ing over to England by way of Odessa, Lemberg and Hamburg, took passage at Liverpool for New York; and from there later in the summer were among the first to find their way to the plains of Kansas. A little later, the large Alexanderwohl congregation, some eight hundred souls, started their trek as a body across the Atlantic.

This Alexanderwohl congregation had been the center of the whole emigration movement from the start. Here the first meetings to discuss the whole situation had been held in 1872 and 73; and their elder, Jacob Buller, was one of the delegation of twelve; and here the Mennonites met General von Totleben. The Alexanderwohl congregation had decided upon emigration even before the return of their delegate from America. Difficulty in securing their passports, however, delayed their departure until the twentieth of July, 1874. On the day they left there were no sad farewell scenes, because there was nobody to say goodbye to. Only seven families, it is said, remained of the whole congregation. Besides the Alexanderwohler a number of individuals from various other villages attached themselves to this group so that the total number in the party that left Hamburg for Kansas was over one thousand.

About the same time, too, the remainder of the Swiss group in Volhynia, about one hundred and fifty families, left for the new world. Many of these were poor, and needed help from the relief agencies in America. Poorer and more miserable still than the Swiss, were the Polish congregations from the region about Ostrog, who, under their leader Tobias Unruh, and with few possessions beyond their travelling expenses, left en masse in mid-winter for the raw prairies of Kansas, where they remained a serious charge upon the Mennonite relief societies for several years. Added to these, were the Hutterites, who left for the Dakotas; and several hundred families from

the Bergthal, Fürstenland and *Kleine Gemeinde* groups, all of whom located on the lands selected for them the year before by their delegates in Manitoba.

The bulk of the emigrants during this first year, it will be observed, left in large groups, consisting sometimes of entire villages and settlements; but individuals from every village attached themselves to these large parties. The emigration fever had not struck all communities with equal fervor; enthusiasm for the adventure varied with the conservatism of the people, and economic conditions; and especially with the zeal of the different elders. It is estimated that by the end of the year about five thousand three hundred souls had located within the United States, mostly in Kansas, and about eleven hundred in Manitoba. The mass migration continued through the following year though with less volume. The largest number this second year located in Manitoba. By 1880, the year that ended the period of grace, the movement had about spent itself. By this time about ten thousand Russian Mennonites had left their homes in the steppes of South Russia for the United States, and about eight thousand for Manitoba.

## A Refuge in Central Asia

Not all of those who had scruples against accepting the proposed forestry service joined the trek to America. There were some who, hoping that the Russian Government might still relent, delayed their going to the last minute; others, dreading the long voyage over seas to a land unfamiliar and full of uncertainties, preferred a refuge nearer home, and preferably under the emblem of their own imperial Russian eagle. This seemed possible in several small semi-independent principalities in Asiatic Turkestan, recently conquered by Russia, and now under Russian jurisdiction, though not yet subject



to the Russian militarization laws. Among these sensitive Mennonites were two small groups — one in the Samara (*Trakt*) settlement, largely from the village of Hahnsau, and another consisting of the followers of one A. Peters, in the Molotschna district.

This strange desire to face eastward rather than to follow their brethren to the west was strengthened by certain chiliastic ideas which infected both groups as a result of the rather wide-spread distribution of the prophetic writings of Jung-Stilling, a German pietistic author well-known among European Mennonites of that day, and other writings of a similar nature. Among the leaders of the movement, who were influenced by this literature, were Elder Hamm in the Hahnsau church, and M. Klassen, a teacher in the local school of the same congregation; and Elder Peters of an independent congregation in Molotschna. At the same time, too, one Claass Epp, Jr., son of the leader with the same name, of the Prussian emigration to Samara in 1853, added impetus to the eastward adventure through a book of his own written in 1877, in which he explained to his own satisfaction the prophecies of Daniel and the mysteries of Revelation. This book went through three editions and was widely distributed among the *Trakt* Mennonites at Epp's own expense.

According to Epp's interpretation, Christ would appear on earth in the year 1889; and somewhere in middle Asia was to be the gathering place for the faithful. The church "Philadelphia" mentioned in Revelation to which the open door was to be revealed, of course was his own little flock. As the year 1880, the close of the exemption period, drew near, preparations were made, not only in the *Trakt* at Samara, but also in Peter's congregation in Molotschna, for the most visionary adventure in all Mennonite history—an exodus to a wild, unknown

barren land, in the heart of a Mohammedan population to meet the Lord and inaugurate the millennium. At the same time a special delegation from the group had succeeded at St. Petersburg in securing from the governor general of Russian Turkestan, General Kauffman, permission to locate near Tashkent, with a promise of military exemption. Epp's followers accordingly sold their property, and started out in their quest for Utopia.

### **Aulie Ata in Turkestan**

They left in several groups. The first train of ten families, seventeen wagons, and forty horses, set out on July 3, 1880, heading toward the east, accompanied for a short distance by relatives, prospective fellow wanderers, and friends, chanting a well-known old hymn as a fitting pilgrim song,

Our journey is through the wilderness to the promised Canaan.

For fifteen long weeks these pious pilgrims continued to drag their weary way through the Ural Mountain passes, across vast stretches of barren plains uninhabited save by bands of roving nomads, desert wastes, enduring all sorts of hardships, until they finally reached Kaplan Bek, some fifteen miles from Tashkent, where they prepared to camp for the winter. Twelve children had been buried along the way. In the course of the following months many more, children and adults, died of typhoid fever and other epidemics.

A little later in the fall, another party of thirteen families from the *Trakt* settlement, and one of fifty-six families from the Molotschna, under the leadership of Elder Peters, had started out. Both of these groups, after enduring hardships equally as distressing as those suffered

by the first party, reached their destination late in the fall. The latter remained in Tashkent for the winter; the former joined their Samara brethren. These three different groups now, having an elder among them in the person of Elder Peters, formed a common church organization. But when Epp who still remained in Samara, heard of this arrangement, he protested vigorously, claiming that his flock needed no human leadership, but would depend entirely in all its decisions upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Because of this jealousy between the Samara and Molotschna groups, and also because of their conflicting views regarding the acceptance of non-combatant military service, they decided to separate. The following spring Elder Peter's party with a small contingent of the more liberal element of the Epp following, all told perhaps a hundred families, finally agreed to accept the same forestry service which was demanded of their brethren back in the home colonies; and which now since the death of Czar Alexander II was also being required in the Asiatic possessions of the empire. They were granted a tract of land at Aulie Ata, along the Talus River, in an elevated plateau near the foothills of the Alexander Mountains, about one hundred and fifty miles northeast of the city of Tashkent. Before World War I this settlement consisted of five villages, with a Mennonite population of about one thousand, approximately half of whom at that time were members of the Mennonite Brethren persuasion.

In the meantime, the last of the wagon trains from Samara, consisting of seventy wagons, carrying twenty-five families, under the leadership this time of Claass Epp himself, got off to a late start in September for the promised land. Due to the lateness of the season, the party ran into fierce snow storms in their passage through the mountains, intense cold, and icy roads. They experienced

suffering even beyond that of the other groups. The repeated breaking down of their wagons, sickness, deaths, births, and even a wedding delayed their progress so that they did not reach Turkestan until after Christmas, after a long and tedious journey of four months. Here they decided to remain for the winter.

### **Ak Metchedj in Khiva**

The following spring Epp took charge of the whole Samara group, such as had not already decided to remain under the somewhat saner leadership of Elder Peters, some sixty families all told; and refusing the non-combatant service for their young men now required in most of Russian Turkestan, as well as in Russia proper. Epp hoped for a time that he might find refuge in nearby Bokhara, where Russian jurisdiction had not yet been completely established. The emir of Bokhara, however, claiming a scarcity of food supplies for his own people, ordered the wanderers out of his country. Entering Turkestan, where Russian military laws now were in force, they were requested by the governor general of that Russian tributary to send their young men into the army. Anticipating the winding-up of all things earthly before long anyway, Epp was not in a hurry to obey the order, as a result of which his party was again sent across the border into Bokhara. After having been driven back and forth across the border repeatedly, and living in their wagons for months in a sort of neutral zone between these two jurisdictions, on land owned by a rather liberal minded noblemen, Epp, finally, in 1882, received an invitation from the khan of Khiva to locate on the latter's private estate where the party might enjoy the religious and political liberties they desired.

Regarding this invitation as the open door spoken of in Revelation, Epp decided to lead his weary seekers

after the millennium to Khiva. Leaving Bokhara, traveling north, and crossing an intervening desert by camel and horse, the small party finally reached the river Lausan, a tributary of the Amu, down which they journeyed by boat until they reached the location selected for their settlement by the khan.

But this open door only proved to be one to further trouble. The first settlement was located in a low, disease infested swamp, along the river bank; the first mud houses with thatched roofs were neither rain nor flood proof. Finding these non-resistant settlers an easy prey, the natives, too, soon began to steal their horses; and finally increasing in their boldness entered their houses in nightly raids, stealing whatever they wanted, even in several cases attempting to carry away some of the young women. In one of these raids one of the settlers was murdered by the marauders. The young men finally demanded permission from the leaders to defend themselves with effective weapons; but the only means of defense allowed them by the church authorities was permission to remain up all night armed with canes and clubs. These weapons, however, were no match for the swords and guns of the bandits; and the church authorities were finally forced to strain their extreme non-resistant principles to the extent of asking protection from the khan. The latter sent them a group of soldiers for a time, but as soon as these were withdrawn the depredations were renewed. Finally the much harassed settlers were offered a refuge by the khan near the city of Khiva, in a small place called *Ak Metchedj*, where they would no longer be troubled by robbers. A traveller passing through this little colony in 1899 states that their population statistics then included thirty-seven families, with one hundred forty souls, living in small adobe huts, and one hundred thirty-two in the nearby cemetery.



## A Lesson from History

Meanwhile, millennialist Epp increased in fanaticism day by day. He was now guided largely in his every day activities by his dreams and visions. For every mystery in Revelation he now found a new explanation. He himself was to be one of the two witnesses to the ushering in of the Lord's appearance on earth. A fellow minister with whom he had quarreled, and whom he had excommunicated from his church, now became the Red Dragon of Revelation, whose expulsion was annually celebrated for some years by his small flock. Other similar holidays were added, while less and less was being made of the old holy days. Soon Epp was to meet Elijah in the skies, and with him be transported bodily to heaven. The time was actually set for this important event; and an audience of both the faithful and doubtful gathered to bid the celestial traveller farewell. An altar had been set up behind which Epp took his stand, dressed in his ascension robes, all ready for the great departure. It is said by some of those present that he actually disappeared, but no one would verify the fact of his ascension.

Finally, the great day for Christ's appearance was also set, March 8, 1889. The day came and passed, and nothing happened. The disappointed prophet who evidently had given a satisfactory explanation for his reappearance on earth after his flight to heaven some time before, now again found little difficulty in giving good reason for his failure to gauge accurately the coming of Judgment Day. He had been given his earlier clue, he said, by the dial of an old wall clock whose hands had pointed to 89. But now in a vision he had been shown that the clock had indicated the wrong number since it had been leaning to one side. Upon being set upright, the dial pointed to 91. That was to mark the end—the year '91. Epp reached the climax of his fanatical career

when he finally claimed that he was the son of Christ, as Christ was the son of God, thus constituting the fourth person of the Godhead. After this he insisted, in all his religious ceremonies, upon the use of the formula Father, Sons, and the Holy Ghost. This was too much, of course, for even his most simple-minded followers. Many had been cured of their foolish beliefs early in their adventure. In the eighties a group had left him and came to America; some went back to Russia to take up the same type of forestry service they might have had in the beginning. Others joined the Aulie Ata group; a mere handful, as misguided as Epp himself, remained with him almost to the last, but not quite. Finding their leader's idiosyncracies and blasphemies no longer bearable, the small remnant finally had to cast him out of their fellowship. He died in 1913. Disillusioned by their false hopes, and sobered by their harrowing experiences, this small group of deluded, though sincere religious enthusiasts finally developed into a fairly stable congregation. Before World War I the little flock consisted of some twenty-five families, huddled together on a land complex of some fifteen acres, and devoted to small hand industry, a little gardening, and daily labor in the nearby city of Khiva.

This episode, one of the strangest in Mennonite annals, deserves this rather detailed treatment here because hereby hangs a moral of interest to Mennonites. Mennonites have been unusually susceptible to unwholesome influences of this sort. A number of times in past Mennonites have been susceptible to unwholesome influences of this sort. A number of times undue stress upon chiliasitic and apocalyptic views on the part of fanatical leaders, has led to unfortunate results.

### **Forestry Service**

The forestry service, which was offered the Men-

nonite young men in lieu of actual army duty was inaugurated in 1880. According to government regulations this work was to consist of planting and cultivating forests on the steppes of South Russia and the term of service was to be for four years. Almost the entire expense of the enterprise was to be met by the Mennonites themselves. They were to erect the barracks, feed and clothe the foresters, heat and care for the buildings, and assume nearly all the necessary expenses involved. The government was to pay each forester twenty kopeks each working day, the equal of about ten cents; and furnish only the working tools and implements.

To the church at large also, was committed the entire spiritual and cultural welfare of the young foresters. This duty was performed by a resident minister appointed by the home church for each camp; a superintendent also was appointed to look after the economic and business interests of each unit. General oversight of the whole service in behalf of the church was entrusted to a Forestry Commission. In this way the cultural solidarity, which was such a characteristic feature of every phase of life in the closed communities of the Mennonite colonies, was not threatened by the forced absence of their young men serving the state during four very impressionable years.

The heavy expenses entailed by this service had to be borne virtually by voluntary contributions from the various congregations, since the Mennonite church did not constitute a corporate, legal body with power to levy taxes. That the congregations responded so freely is a tribute to their denominational loyalty, as well as to their realization that the preservation of their special privileges demanded of all the fullest co-operation. While the contributions were more or less voluntary, yet the churches worked out a plan which aimed to distribute the burden fairly and equitably among the various congrega-

tions on the basis of ability to pay. An assessment was levied upon both individuals and corporations according to the value of their property. Persons holding property worth less than five hundred rubles were exempt. The whole burden was thus assumed as a common obligation of the entire church.

For some years the average enrollment of foresters remained about four hundred, at an average maintenance cost of approximately seventy thousand rubles, not counting the original cost of the buildings. As the Mennonite population increased, the number of men in the service did also. In 1913 the entire number of young Mennonites serving the nation in this substitute capacity numbered about one thousand, at an expense to the church of three hundred and fifty thousand rubles. This was a peace time year of course; in war time there was a heavy increase in both men and money involved. This was the price in terms of money that the Mennonites of Russia were willing to pay for the preservation of their peace principles in the empire.

## ERA OF EXPANSION

### The General Conference

These common obligations, together with others, imposed upon and assumed by the Mennonite churches of the various branches, necessitated closer cooperation among the various independent congregations, and a more united organization than had prevailed heretofore. The churches in general had maintained their traditional congregational and independent type of church government, although almost from the start necessity frequently demanded the periodic meeting of the elders to discuss common religious as well as secular questions. These meetings as already noted earlier in this chapter were spoken

of as the *Church Council* of the elders, and were more or less local in their nature, dealing more or less with local religious matters. But now with the growing importance of such non-religious problems as forestry, schools, the preservation of the German language, and other questions more or less political in their nature, the need for a more compact working organization and a closer cooperation among the various loosely held together congregations than had hitherto prevailed, became evident.

The *General Conference of Mennonite Congregations in Russia* was founded November 17, 1882, at Halbstadt. The following year the first session was held. These conferences were attended by elders, ministers, and lay delegates. The first sessions dealt with problems confronting the congregations in connection with the newly-inaugurated forestry service, the establishment of a theological seminary, and a conference periodical. The motto of the conference was: "Unity in essentials, tolerance in non-essentials, and charity in all things." In following this policy and in its ministration to the young men in forestry service, the conference achieved great success. The proposed conference seminary, although often discussed, never materialized. A semi-conference paper was begun by J. Thiessen, D. H. Epp, and H. A. Ediger in 1905, which had to be discontinued during World War I. During the years 1925-28, the conference published *Unser Blatt*, which again had to be discontinued because of governmental restrictions.

Later sessions extended the scope of the conference. In 1885 steps were taken to found a deaf and dumb institution. In 1893 a new hymnal was published. In 1898 a new confession of faith was adopted, which had been drawn up by a special commission appointed at an earlier session. Frequently the conference busied itself with



matters of church discipline and personal conduct, in an advisory capacity only, no doubt. In one of the sessions foresters were advised not to marry while in service, very good advice under the circumstances. In another, teachers were advised to conduct their Christmas exercises in the schools in a Christian spirit, and especially exclude objectionable dramatic performances. In still another, marriage between cousins was discouraged. The session of 1910 held at Schönsee was of special importance. For the first time the Mennonite Brethren attended the conference, although they had been invited to do so some years before. Several ministers were also appointed to visit the churches in Siberia, and distribute such financial aid among them as they needed.

By this time, too, the Russianization program of imperial minister Stolypin had proceeded so far as to demand that all the delegates to the conference be certified to the imperial government, that the record of the proceedings be published in the Russian language, and that an official representative of the government be permitted to attend every session.

In fact during all this period, since 1880, the czars and their reactionary ministries, with occasional brief spells of liberalism, fighting back the rising tide of nationalism and parliamentarianism which threatened the overthrow of the Russian autocracy, were becoming more and more suspicious of special liberties and privileges. In the attempt to stamp out the growing spirit of nationalism among the Poles, Finns, Lithuanians, Germans and other minorities on the outskirts of the empire, increasingly drastic measures were invented, hoping thereby that all these foreign elements might ultimately become good Russians. The Russianization program included, as already suggested, increased control of schools, use of the Russian language, censorship of the press and free speech,

and curtailment of political liberties in general. The Mennonites of course suffered with the rest.

Although the Mennonites took no active part in the radical social and political agitation of the times, yet they were severely attacked in the press and before the government officials by many of the Slavophile partisans who were envious of such special privileges as the Mennonites still enjoyed, and likely suspicious of their Germanic culture. In the brief liberal revolution of 1905 the Mennonites took no active part, although, since they, too, were given the right to vote they availed themselves of this privilege in the elections of the period. Being opposed to radical socialism, they for the most part joined the more conservative Octobrist party in their political affiliations, largely because this party guaranteed religious toleration and freedom of worship, as well as freedom of the press for the minority groups. Two Mennonites sat in the Duma in the years immediately following, though not directly elected by the Mennonites themselves—Abraham Bergmann, a landlord of the Octobrist party, member of the third and fourth sessions; and Peter Schröder, from Crimea, member of the Cadet party which was still more liberal than the Octobrists, but also favorable to concessions to subject peoples. Schröder was a member of the fourth Duma.

In 1910 the General Conference appointed a *Glaubenskommission* which in 1912 was changed into a *Kommission für Kirchenangelegenheiten* (KfK), and which in turn practically resolved itself in the critical days that followed into a commission on church and state relations. During the years just preceding World War I this commission, among other arduous tasks, found it increasingly difficult to convince the government that Mennonites were not a "sect," but one of the regularly recognized religious confessions; for as a "sect" they would lose not

only their special privileges, but would become subject to all the arbitrary and brutal treatment then being meted out to all small religious groups that were branded with the name "sect." Both as Germans and as a still privileged religious group, the Mennonites were becoming objects of suspicion to many in high authority. The first World War and its after results only increased their troubles.

### **Population Pressure and Expansion 1870-1914**

As already noted, the original Mennonite settlements were granted more land than was immediately taken up by the model estates first distributed to each head of a family. This surplus land area was reserved as a communal reserve possession, the income from which was set apart as a special fund to be used later in helping to purchase new homes for the surplus population that had outgrown its original land allotment. This general colonial policy was followed from time to time throughout the century by the daughter and granddaughter colonies as their numbers increased.

And so, compact Mennonite communities expanded throughout southern Russia, always following the cheaper lands on the advancing frontier, toward the southeast into Asia, northeast toward the Urals, and over into western Siberia. The landseekers were frequently of the landless class, and often of the more radical or at least of the more emotional religious wings of the church. The Mennonite Brethren, the Templers and other offshoots from the main body were frequently more numerous in the new settlements than in the old. The Russian Mennonites thus remained almost exclusively a farmer class; very few went to the cities. As among country people generally, who live in frontier regions where land is plentiful and labor scarce, the population growth here

reached almost its biological limits. The original Mennonite population in Russia in 1820 of about nine thousand had doubled about every twenty-five years, reaching by 1914, including the emigrants to the American prairies, and their descendants, where land conditions were like those of Russia, the total of about one hundred and seventy thousand, a population growth unequalled anywhere else among Mennonites.

Church membership, too, quite contrary to what one finds among Mennonites in other parts of Europe, in Russia about equalled the expansion of the people. The growth of the church in Russia was rather a swarming of the people than an expansion of a faith. Forbidden by their charter of privileges to make converts among the natives, and kept from leaving their own religious group by the danger of losing their special privileges in case they did, and the sense of superior culture—all these forces tended to keep all Mennonites within the fold; and the fold from expanding beyond their own flesh and blood. Absent, too, were many of the causes that in other parts of Europe continually threatened the existence of the Mennonite faith—city life, persecution, a superior outside cultural environment, isolation in small scattered groups making organized church life difficult, intermarriage with non-Mennonites, and other disintegrating influences.

Although a number of small daughter colonies had been established during the first half of the century, yet the large swarming of the people for economic or conscientious reasons did not set in until the sixties or seventies. Although some of these daughter colonies have been mentioned earlier in this chapter, a brief mention again of the most important in the way of a summary may not be out of place here.

The first daughter community of this period was established in the *Crimea*, in 1862, by a group of Molotschna

landseekers, who had first become acquainted with the fair fields about Simferopol while engaged in transporting the wounded from the battlefields to their own Molotschna homes during the Crimean War. These first settlements since grew into twenty-five villages, and a number of large estates, in some cases including thousands of acres, with a combined population in 1926, of about five thousand. These estates of course have since all been nationalized.

*Fürstenland*, which was purchased from the Grand Duke Michael in 1864 by a group of Chortitza Mennonites, consisted in 1911 of five villages and a population of eighteen hundred. *Borsenko*, founded in 1865, also by a group from Chortitza, consisted in 1915 of five villages with a population of six hundred. One of the largest communities of this time at *Sagradovka*, in the province of Kherson, was purchased in 1871 by Mennonites from the Molotschna colony. In 1918 this settlement consisted of sixteen villages and six thousand souls, exclusive of those living on large private estates. During the sixties, too, a number of religious dissenters from the main body of Mennonites, who incidentally also belonged to the poorer classes established a colony in the *Kuban* and the *Caucasus*. The large migration to America in the seventies, largely for conscience' sake, but also partly for economic reasons, will be given more detailed treatment later in this book.

This large migration to America relieved the population pressure for a time, but in 1885 another Molotschna daughter colony was founded at *Memrik*, which by 1910 had expanded to a land area of about twenty-five thousand acres, and a population of some three thousand. After this, population expansion began on a generous scale to the frontier lands far to the east near the European boundaries of the empire.



Beginning with the middle nineties, some thirty villages were located beyond the Volga in the provinces of *Orenburg* and *Ufa*, near the Ural foothills. The settlement of some fifteen villages made in 1901 in *Terek*, a province in the southeastern corner of European Russia in the Caucasus near the Caspian Sea, was a mistake. Drought, and paradoxical though it may seem, floods, famine, robbery by bandits, malaria—all these nearly liquidated the settlement by 1914; then came the war which permitted the bandits from the foothills to drive the whole settlement back again to the mother colonies.

With the opening of the twentieth century, a large colonization movement started from both the younger settlements along the Volga, and the older colonies farther east toward the broad unsettled steppes of western Siberia. Each family here was aided by the mother colonies to the extent of four hundred rubles. During the years preceding World War I, one hundred villages were established near *Tomsk* and *Omsk* on cheap lands at first far from the Siberian railroad, but later with better transportation and market facilities, on a land area of over one million acres, nearly one-half the size of all the land occupied by the entire Russian Mennonite population; and with a total population, in 1914, of fifteen thousand souls.

## Industrial Growth

Although the Mennonites remained largely a farming people, yet they did not entirely neglect their industrial interests. For the first half century of their life in Russia, their industrial needs were supplied mainly by their own local workshops. Nearly every village had its own craftsmen. The tastes of the early settlers being simple, their imports from the outside were few. They ground their own wheat in their own mills; grew their own wool which they wove into cloth and cut their own

clothes. They made their own crude farm utensils; constructed their own simple furniture; and built their own brick ovens. The statistics for Chortitza in 1819, show that in a population of two thousand, eight hundred and eighty-eight people, distributed through eighteen villages, there were two clock-makers, nine turners, two coopers, eighty-eight joiners, twenty-six carpenters, sixteen smiths, forty-nine weavers, one dyer, twenty-five tailors, twenty shoemakers, besides several brewers, millers, and others, not all perhaps working full time at their respective trades.

With the coming of large-scale wheat growing, however, during the latter half of the century, and the demand for better farm machinery, big flour mills and large factories arose, which not only supplied all the local needs, but whose products in course of time found a ready market throughout all South Russia. Halbstadt and Chortitza both became famous in course of time for their production of fine farm machinery. In 1911 eight of the largest of these establishments furnished ten percent of all such machinery of South Russia; and six percent of all that was manufactured in the entire Russian Empire. The largest of these Mennonite firms, Lepp and Wallmann, from Schönwiese, produced in one year, fifty thousand mowers, three thousand threshing machines, besides thousands of gang plows and other farm utensils, all sent to the remotest parts of the empire.

As just indicated, Mennonite manufacturers confined themselves largely to farm machinery and flour mills. Their flour mills, too, were famous, and numerous. Textile mills, once a promising industry, vanished with the passing of sheep raising as a major occupation. The establishment of a large starch factory proved a failure. Other small industries, more or less local, embraced vinegar factories, brick yards, breweries, cheese factories, and the like. Mennonites never took to tradè; and there were

few merchants among them. Outside of a few cooperative stores, merchandising was often left to native Russians, and the Jews, who had no scruples against excessive profits.

### **Benevolences and Mission Interest**

Mennonites not only in Russia, but everywhere, especially when living in large compact communities have been inclined to hold themselves aloof from the usual political and social activities of their governments. In Russia they were never a burden to their government, either. They always took care of their poor and unfortunate Mennonite self-sufficiency here extended through the whole field of social welfare. They established their own hospitals, orphan homes, insurance companies, old peoples homes, a school for the deaf and dumb, and in 1911, a sanitarium for epileptics and those with nervous diseases.

With the revival of their religious life in the latter part of the past century, the Russian Mennonites also developed an interest in missionary effort. In 1881 the pioneer missionary, Heinrich Dirks, returning from the Dutch Mennonite mission work in Sumatra, became the elder of the Gnadenfeld congregation, and travelling secretary of the mission cause, in which capacity he aroused a growing interest in missionary effort. The work in Russia was carried on through the Dutch Society in Amsterdam, in which the Russian Mennonites were represented by a board member. At the close of the century the Russian church furnished the major portion of both the money and the workers for this society. In 1910 there were ten active missionaries of the Russian Mennonites in Sumatra and Java, while four had returned on furlough. The Bolshevik Revolution stopped all active participation of the Russian Mennonites in the Dutch enterprise, with the re-

sult that the work of the society almost came to a standstill. The Mennonite Brethren were also greatly interested in the missionary cause from the beginning of their separate existence, supporting at first the efforts of other mission boards.

### Cultural Life

Culturally, the Mennonites were only slightly influenced by their Russian environment. They retained their German inheritance and Mennonite traditions to the end. Many of the elders, and most of the older people spoke Russian with difficulty, if at all. By 1897 the statistics indicate that at that time, of the whole Mennonite population, only four hundred and eighty-six were designated as being Russian speaking, and most of these no doubt were no longer living in the colonies, and not in close touch with their kinsfolk. The younger people of course were being taught the Russian language in the schools, and were absorbing more or less of Russian culture. The language of the pulpit, however, and of the books generally read remained German; that of everyday speech the Low German of the Vistula Delta.

Being a farmer folk, the Mennonites of Russia were not of a literary turn of mind. They wrote few books, and such doctrinal and controversial pamphlets as they produced were of little value; and none of literary quality with the possible exception of a book of poems by Bernhard Harder. Their reading matter was imported from Germany, and consisted in the early days of the works of Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, the *Martyrs' Mirror* occasionally, the *Wandelnde Seele*, perhaps Arndt's *Wahres Christenthum*, and in some circles the writings of Jung-Stilling, a German mystic. But even these books were no longer read by the younger generation near the close of the century. The Mennonite Brethren were inclined to

read the works of the German Baptists. The only writings of any permanent value were those of the local Mennonite historians—Peter Hildebrand, D. H. Epp, Franz Isaac, Franz Bartsch, M. Klaassen, P. M. Friesen and others; but even these works were not widely known, with the exception of the last.

With the opening of the new century, however, there seemed to be some prospects of a new interest in matters cultural. A number of the younger men, graduates of European universities, were beginning to show some ability as writers and artists, even though the learned professions were still rather relatively few in number. There were a number of doctors, practically no lawyers, a few promising sculptors, and several embryo story writers, a lot of teachers and preachers, of course, but these latter without much special training.

The *Botschafter*, first published in 1905 at Ekaterinoslav, though privately printed, was the semi-official organ of the Mennonites; and the *Friedensstimme* published at Halbstadt for the first time in 1903, served the same purpose for the Mennonite Brethren. The publishing firm of *Raduga* founded in Halbstadt by several enterprising Mennonites published during its brief existence a number of books and tracts of interest to Mennonites especially, and widely distributed throughout the Mennonite settlements. A number of year books also were published by these privately owned firms. But the anti-German legislation, and later the revolution put an end not only to the German printed literature, but ultimately to all religious reading matter and the publishing houses.

Improvement of the school system kept pace during this period with progress elsewhere in spite of governmental interference, largely, however, in what might be called secondary education. The Mennonites of Russia were not greatly interested as yet in higher academic



training. But in every colony there was likely to be a *Zentralschule*, the chief aim of which was to train teachers for the public schools. Several girl's schools had been established, and a commerce school at Halbstadt, which regarded commercial subjects, however, as a mere side issue. One of the leading spirits before the war of this school was the well-known Bible teacher, Benjamin H. Unruh.

Prior to World War I there were, in all the Mennonite settlements, more than four hundred elementary schools of which many had more than one teacher, most of whom were men. The total number of teachers in Mennonite elementary and secondary schools must have reached one thousand. There were nineteen secondary schools (*Zentralschule*) and six more for girls only. In addition to these, there were two teachers' colleges, one at Halbstadt and one at Chortitza; three business schools, one school for the deaf and dumb, one deaconess training institute, and a number of Bible schools. About two hundred young people were attending non-Mennonite higher institutions of learning in Russia, and about fifty attended seminaries, universities, and Bible schools, mostly in Germany and Switzerland.

### **The Ministry**

No religious people ever rise higher in their cultural achievements than the intellectual level of their spiritual leadership. For the largest part of the century the ministry in Russia was selected from the farmer group; and, being unsalaried, were chosen from the wealthier land-owners. Thus the ministry enjoyed unusual influence over the destinies of the whole people during the first half of the century, when the landlords, ministers and political leaders were all from the same economic class. Even though this high calling tended later in the

century to become more highly specialized, yet preaching as a profession still remained very much an avocation to farming or teaching perhaps. As late as 1910 it was estimated that among the Mennonite Brethren only five percent of the preachers received financial support from their congregations; and even in this small number were included the itinerant evangelists who of necessity had to depend on such support. In this same year in a list of one hundred and fifty preachers from both branches of the church, one hundred and ten had only finished the elementary schools; forty had had some theological or pedagogical training in the *Zentralschulen*; and only one had university education. Of the five hundred ministers among the one hundred thousand Mennonites of Russia, perhaps two-thirds had neither theological training nor special preparation for their high calling.

Just before the war, however, there were indications of rapid changes. Teachers in both the elementary and secondary schools were increasingly being impressed into the ministry. A number of young men were abroad in religious training schools preparing for service in the home churches. Sentiment in favor of financial support of the ministry was also rapidly gaining ground throughout the churches.

In conclusion, it is quite evident that by 1914 the Mennonites of South Russia enjoyed not only a degree of material prosperity, but also a state of culture far above the level of their Russian neighbors, and somewhat above that of their fellow German colonists.

## WORLD WAR I AND AFTER

We began this chapter with the observation that the Russian Mennonites, in the beginning, enjoyed here in the land of the most autocratic ruler of all Europe, a degree

of religious toleration and civil liberty, and special privileges unparalleled in all Mennonite history. But we must close it with the disappointing confession that since World War I they have suffered a succession of tragedies—political oppression, religious persecution, destruction of property, famine, disease, rapine, slave labor, deportation, family separation, and wholesale massacre far beyond that experienced even by their Dutch forefathers in the darkest days of the inquisition.

Of course many of the Mennonite leaders had realized for some time that with the advance of democracy the enjoyment of special privileges would become increasingly difficult. As already noted, control of their schools, exclusive use of the German language, local political autonomy, and other special concessions at first freely granted the early settlers above those enjoyed by the native Russians, were already well on the way toward liquidation even before the war. Exemption from military service especially remained a source of envy on the part of their Russian neighbors, and was severely criticized by the public press. Speaking the German language, and in close cultural contact with the fatherland, the Mennonites were suspected and openly accused of German sympathies by the super-patriots of Russia. During the early stages of World War I it was seriously suggested by certain authorities that their young men be removed from their home settlements and sent to work in the coal mines of western Siberia. This plan fortunately was not carried out. Instead, within a few months after the opening of hostilities, the Mennonite leaders were summoned to St. Petersburg to arrange for some suitable service for their young men within the limits of the special privileges they were still enjoying. It was finally agreed that the Mennonites should either remain in the forestry service or enter the sanitary department,

largely devoted to hospital work. About twelve thousand young Mennonites entered these two departments during the course of the war, about equally divided.

### **Non-combatant Service**

Those choosing forestry were assigned guard duty, largely protecting the widely scattered forests of Russia against thieves, illegal hunters, fire and other hazards. Their duties were by no means easy. Supported entirely by the home churches, given no government support and little attention, often poorly clad, poorly sheltered, with inadequate food, cold and hungry, unarmed, marooned often in inaccessible forests, removed from their families who, too, had to shift for themselves, the lot of the forester, especially if married, was not a happy one. Repeated petitions from the churches at home requesting the government to adequately meet the needs of the foresters, and especially to provide for their families, if married, met with little response at St. Petersburg. After the downfall of the czarist regime in 1917, six thousand foresters followed the army back home, and with the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, in 1918, this special form of Mennonite service to the state came to an end.

The other young Mennonites were attached to the sanitary department, forming complete hospital units, including stretcher bearers who gathered the wounded on the battlefield, complete hospital trains transporting them back to hospitals at Ekaterinoslav and Moscow, also fully manned by Mennonites. These units were reported to be among the best in the entire army. Some hundred and twenty Mennonites lost their lives on the battlefield and from disease while on duty during the war. The entire expense of the hospital, as well as the forestry work was met by the Mennonites themselves without government pay. It was estimated that in

the year 1917, the last year of the war, the churches collected over three million ruble for the support of their young men in these two forms of alternative service.

### **Regarded as Alien Germans**

The Mennonites suffered with the other German colonists all the drastic anti-German legislation passed by the government of the czar during the early stages of the war against such of his subjects as had a German ancestry even though three or four generations back. These colonists were regarded almost as enemy aliens rather than as loyal subjects. Everything German was tabooed--the use of the German language in public except in formal worship, the printing and distribution of German books and periodicals, and to a certain extent preaching, or performing wedding or funeral services in the forbidden tongue. Violation of these regulations invited punishment.

Since many of the older Mennonite preachers were not adept in the use of the Russian language in public, Mennonite worship frequently took on a liturgical character, consisting largely of Scripture reading without comment, singing and prayer in the forbidden tongue, a form of service which some of the more ingenious preachers occasionally knew how to manipulate so that it would preach as effective a lesson as if it had been a regular sermon. Naturally these German suspects were carefully watched for any sign of supposed friendliness toward the common enemy. It is reported of one zealous native superpatriot, not well versed in German, that he once charged a certain Mennonite preacher with having prayed for Kaiser Wilhelm; but whose only crime turned out to be that in the course of repeating the Lord's Prayer he had uttered the petition *Dein Wille geschehe*, "Wille" having been mistaken by the Russian for Wilhelm.



Hoping to escape the consequences of this anti-German agitation by disclaiming any German ancestry, the German-speaking colonists, both Lutherans and Mennonites, insisted they were not real Germans. The Lutherans claimed a Swiss origin, while the Mennonites maintained that their ancestors had come originally from Holland, and only indirectly through Germany. The Russian authorities insisted, however, that since they were thoroughly saturated with German culture during their stay in Prussia, and spoke only the German language, and read German books, they thus must be regarded as Germans. *Holländerei* a certain Mennonite writer among them calls this attempt of the Russian Mennonites to deny their German heritage.

The most vicious of these anti-German regulations was the decree issued in 1915 ordering all the German colonists to sell their land equities within a year. Obviously this could not be done within such a short period during the war time, except at ruinous prices; and but few complied with the law. The penalty for non-compliance was forcible sale by the land bank at such a price as such a sale might bring. The meager returns were then turned over to the owner, not in hard cash, but in twenty-five-year bonds of doubtful value at a low interest rate. Fortunately for the Mennonites, the land bank, like everything else Russian, worked slowly; and the process of liquidation had hardly begun when the Revolution of 1917 afforded a temporary breathing spell from all anti-German discrimination.

The expectation of relief, however, was tempered with certain misgivings among the German colonists, and especially among the Mennonites. While the anti-German land laws were not immediately enforced yet they were not repealed. The very fact, too, that the new government claimed to rest upon a thoroughly democratic

basis was not altogether reassuring to such groups as had enjoyed special privileges under the czar's regime; for strange though it may seem, the special privileges of a minority frequently fare better under an autocracy than in a democracy. The Kerensky government was avowedly socialistic, though the exact form that the socialistic state was to take had not been thoroughly worked out. But there was much talk of political and economic re-organization along local and regional lines with a large degree of local autonomy. The German colonists, hoping that perhaps they might retain most of their old privileges by forming themselves into such compact German units, called a conference early in the summer of 1917 to take such steps as their interests might dictate. The Mennonites were also represented at this congress of Germans.

### **Mennonite Congress**

But it was soon discovered that although the Mennonites had much in common with the other German colonists, yet their demand for a continuation of their exemption from military service under the new regime made it impracticable to work in complete accord with the other Germans, who were not insistent on such demands. The Mennonites, consequently, withdrew from this movement, and called a congress of their own, consisting of nearly two hundred delegates representing the whole Mennonite population, which met at Ohrloff later in the summer to take such steps as necessary to protect their own special interests in the new order. A brief review of the questions discussed here suggests most effectively the nature of the problems which troubled the Mennonites at this time.

Benjamin Unruh, prominent leader of the Mennonites at the Molotschna, teacher in the commerce school at

Halbstadt and a few years later to become one of the delegates of the *Studien-Kommission* sent to America, was elected as chairman of the congress.\* Among the questions discussed after a resolution had been passed perfecting a permanent "All Mennonite Congress" with an executive committee to act in its stead in the interims, called the *Mennozentrum*, were the relation of the Mennonites to the state, land liquidation, military exemption, schools, and such other matters as affected the cultural and religious life of the Mennonite people. The debates which sometimes became animated and earnest showed that there was not always unanimity on all questions discussed. Some, the landless perhaps, were not unreservedly opposed to a limited program of land redistribution, though few were out and out socialists. On the military question, too, there was some difference of opinion on direct and indirect service. While some were absolutists, opposed to both indirect and direct service, others maintained that they owed the state every obligation except the actual shedding of blood. To these latter, troubled with neither a keen sense of logic nor a tender conscience, compromise with the government might not have been a difficult question. Chairman Unruh, better acquainted with the political trends of the times than the average, called attention to the fact that the Mennonites had now come to the turning of the road in their exemption privileges, as well as in their non-resistant faith; and that it was not at all certain as to what they might expect from the new government. They must be prepared for the worst. The support of the young men in the forestry and sanitary service was also a matter of considerable interest, for the war was still on at this time, and as already suggested, the Mennonites

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\* This congress must not be confused with the regular *Allgemeine Bundes Konferenz* which also held a session during the summer. This meeting is called a congress, not a conference.

had to pay all the expenses of their young men in the field out of their own pockets. It was estimated that the total amount needed for the coming year would be about three million five hundred thousand ruble,—over one million five hundred thousand dollars. The families left at home, where married men had to serve, had to be provided for also.

The fall of the Kerensky government in October of 1917, not only shattered the hope among the Mennonites of an immediate amelioration of their lot, but on the other hand inaugurated a three-year reign of terror and suffering among both Mennonites and the whole population of southern and eastern Russia almost unequalled among any civilized people in modern history. The Red and White armies fighting back and forth across the Ukraine, confiscated the people's livestock and food supplies, and spread disease epidemics everywhere. In the interim lawless hordes of outlaws, made up of the discontented, the criminal classes and rabble in general, marched through the country at will, plundering, raping and killing. Even when the Bolsheviks gained control of the situation and established a certain degree of stable political order, material conditions were not immediately improved; for the new rulers nationalized all the landed estates and replaced highly industrious and efficient Mennonite farmers with ignorant and inexperienced city folk as farm managers. The period of occupation by the German army during the summer of 1918 was a pleasant interlude. Worst of all among the Germans of the Ukraine was the rule of a certain bandit, Machno, by name, who held sway in this region during the winter of 1919-20.

### **The Reign of Machno**

A few random incidents here must suffice as a sug-

gestion of the horrors the Mennonites of this region suffered at this time. A victim of the terror from the village of Münsterberg in the Sagradovka colony speaks as follows—

Nearly everybody in our village was struck down or murdered—old men of eighty as well as infants of a few weeks. This terror lasted from 7 to 8 o'clock, and during that time ninety-six persons were killed. After the bandits had robbed us of all our money and such personal belongings as they could carry with them they set fire to the buildings and departed for the other villages.

In another village in this same district these fiends in human form cut off the heads of eight of the men they had killed, and then placed the heads on chairs as a gruesome welcome to the absent master of the house when he would open the door on his return.

In Eichenfeld of the Nicolaipol colony eighty-one men and four women were killed in one night. Only two men of the entire population above sixteen years of age were left.

These were a few of the extreme cases to be sure, but in nearly every village visited by the bandits there was more or less of wanton destruction of property and murder, and especially of robbery. Even worse than this, was the torture inflicted on men for the purpose of extracting the last penny from the victim though the last penny had long been spent; and the wholesale rape of the women, who at the point of a gun frequently had to sacrifice their honor to save the life of a father or husband. Hundreds of men and women were killed outright in the Mennonite villages visited during these raids, whole villages destroyed, and an untold amount of personal property carried away. Other German non-Mennonite villages and some Russians in the Ukraine suffered the same fate. The Old Colony, Sagradovka, and Nicolaipol suffered most



among the Mennonite colonies; Molotschna somewhat less; and the Crimea and Memrik very little.

### Disease Epidemics

Hard upon this trail of robbery, murder and rapine followed disease epidemics spread by the Red and White armies as well as by the robber bandits—spotted typhus, cholera and venereal diseases. While Machno killed his hundreds, typhus and cholera claimed its thousands. Of course the whole population of South Russia was affected more seriously than the German colonies, but we are concerned here only with the Mennonites. Here again the Chortitza district was the most intense sufferer. In the village of Chortitza, with a population of a little less than seven hundred, nearly everybody was sick. One hundred and fifty died. O. O. Miller, who as a representative of the American Mennonite Relief committee visited the Molotschna Mennonites soon after this period, speaking of the destruction caused by both the civil war and bandits as well as disease, is authority for the statement that by March, 1920, in the Chortitza district with a pre-war Mennonite population of fifteen thousand, sixteen of the villages were completely destroyed with no inhabitants left whatever; three hundred and eighty persons were shot or struck down and tortured; ninety-two women raped; forty-two houses burned; one hundred and eleven homes destroyed; one hundred and thirteen horses taken; also one thousand, seven hundred and seventeen cows, one thousand and seventy-three hogs, forty thousand bushels of wheat, ten thousand bushels of barley. Those stricken with typhus numbered eight thousand of whom twelve hundred died. These statistics taken, perhaps, too early to be entirely correct, yet indicate the terrible conditions of the time in the Mennonite settlements. Under such distress it is needless to say that there was

little of economic activity, and no social functions, nor much of organized religious services. All organized life was completely paralyzed.

### *Selbstschutz*

It was undoubtedly inevitable that the traditional doctrine of passive resistance, which too often had become a mere doctrine, and no longer a guiding principle of life among the Mennonite young men, should be put to a severe test when challenged by robber bands who threatened to murder their men and ravish their women. The young men of the Molotschna district, where seemingly there always had been less regard for traditions than among the Chortitza Mennonites, did not stand the test. Even before the robber bands came, the young men in this colony, influenced largely by the Germans during their brief occupation of the Ukraine in 1918, organized themselves into a *Selbstschutz*, a protective band, for the purpose of offering resistance to whatever dangers might threaten them in the future. At the time, no doubt, there was perhaps little thought that force might ever be needed or used. But when the bandits actually appeared in the region the following year these *Selbstschutz* people joined the neighboring Lutheran colony in an organized attempt to resist the invaders. For a short time they gave a good account of themselves, but in the end the invading force was too much for them; both the Lutherans and Mennonites had to disband, and leave their colonies to the mercy of the invaders. In later years the older generation of Mennonites as represented in Conferences officially condemned the *Selbstschutz* as a tactical blunder as well as a violation of their traditional peace principles.

### **Feeding the Hungry**

It would seem that the terrors of civil war, the

ravages of banditry, the persecutions of a tyrannical and anti-religious government and the devastations caused by disease epidemics—all the result of man's greed and lust would be enough grief for any people to bear at any one time; but it was as though providence itself had entered the lists against the ill-fated Russian people when in 1921-22 it sent the Ukraine, the bread basket of Europe, a series of dry years which resulted in the worst famine in all Russian history. South Russia had often experienced both drouth and famine before; under normal conditions these were never serious. But conditions now were not normal. The loss of horses without which farming operations could not be carried on, and of livestock; the heavy grain requisitions demanded for export, leaving very little surplus for an emergency, and often not enough for the next year's seeding; the physical weakness of both man and beast; the careless management of many of the larger estates resulting from the replacement of industrious farmers by ignorant and inefficient city-bred managers; the collapse of the whole transportation system; and above all the hopelessness of it all—all this now, together with two years of hot winds and drouth made a combination that spelled disaster for nearly a third of the whole Russian population, taking the lives of millions of native Russians and thousands of Germans and Mennonites. The Mennonites, because of their superior industry, and general intelligence, fared better than the other Russians, though the list of those who died of starvation, and as a result of famine was a heavy one.

It is not the intention here to present a statistical account of the famine casualties. A few pen pictures here and there, must suffice to give the reader a glimpse at least of its terror among both the native Russians and the Mennonites. Professor A. J. Miller, director of the American Mennonite Relief work during this period, in *Feed-*

*ing the Hungry*, graphically describes the famine conditions in the native Russian villages.

Speaking of his first arrival in the starving Mennonite colonies, Professor Miller says "At Alexandrovsk we were received as messengers from heaven."

Famine and poverty lasted longer in the eastern settlements than among the Mennonites of South Russia. As late as 1923 after conditions had already greatly improved in the Molotschna and Chortitza areas a report from the Siberian Mennonites stated that among the seventeen thousand Mennonites in those settlements five thousand were without food of their own.

It is small wonder that the Mennonites as a result of these cumulative disasters, should again seek a way of escape by means of an exodus to some other promised land. The native Russians had no possibility of escape. They would have to remain and carry on as best they could. But to the Mennonites, limited in number, whose whole past history for four hundred years was characterized as a series of treks from one promised land to another, with many relatives and brethren already on this side of the Atlantic—to them escape from the Russian terror through another mass migration seemed possible and inevitable. This movement had already gained considerable momentum before the Famine of 1921. The Siberian Mennonites had already written their Mennonite brethren in Amsterdam suggesting a loan either from the Dutch Mennonites, or the Dutch Government, running up into the millions, sufficiently large to transport the whole Mennonite population in Siberia, some twenty-five thousand, to one of the East India islands. The amount of money involved of course was too large to be given serious consideration by the Dutch Mennonites.

In the meantime, too, in the early summer of 1920, the Molotschna Mennonites had sent a commission called

a *Studien-Kommission*, headed by Benjamin H. Unruh, and A. A. Friesen, both teachers in the Halbstadt schools, to America by way of Switzerland, Germany and Holland for the purpose of investigating the possibilities of aid for a mass migration out of Russia, preferably to America, as well as help to build up their economic life again in their native land. But to many, even before the famine, it was evident that the Mennonites, and especially Mennonitism was doomed in Russia. It was this commission that first brought to America, and the outside world the news of the actual condition of their Mennonite brethren.

### Mennonite Central Committee

Although the plight of the Russian Mennonites had not yet reached its most acute stage by this time, yet the commission succeeded in arousing a great deal of sympathy in behalf of their brethren among the Mennonites in the various countries they visited. Before the end of this year committees had been organized in all of them for the purpose of rendering such help as might be needed. The Germans, themselves, hard-pressed economically, could not do much except to take care of such Mennonite refugees as had crossed the border; but they organized a special commission, *Deutsche Mennoniten-Hilfe* (D. M. H.). The Dutch Mennonites rendered very substantial aid during the famine years through an organization christened with the same name by which the well-known commission which helped the Swiss Mennonites to migrate to Pennsylvania in the early part of the eighteenth century, namely—"Commission for Foreign Needs," with Ds. A. Binnerts, of Haarlem as chairman, and Ds. T. O. Hylkema of Giethoorn as secretary. The American Mennonites, too, in the late summer of 1920, in a united effort, formed the "Mennonite Central Committee" with



P. C. Hiebert, of Hillsboro, Kansas, a member of the Mennonite Brethren church, as chairman; Levi Mumaw of Scottdale, Pennsylvania, representing the Old Mennonites, as secretary; and Maxwell Kratz, a Philadelphia attorney, representing the General Conference. Later other members were added to represent other branches of the church.

Since the major part of the relief work fell to the American Mennonites a few details of their efforts seems justified here. The first task of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) logically was to find out just what was needed. In this initial work, as well as in all the preliminary stages, the Old Mennonites took a leading part, for the reason that this branch of the church already had a well-organized relief work in operation in the war zones, and had just established a Near East Relief station in Constantinople, on the very threshold into Russia. This work was largely in the hands of a group of devoted young men and women, mostly graduates of Goshen College. Entrance into Russia at this time was both difficult and dangerous, since the country was still in the throes of a bloody civil war. The MCC naturally turned to the group at Constantinople to furnish volunteers for the attempt to reach the Mennonite settlements. O. O. Miller, and Clayton Kratz, both Pennsylvanians, and Arthur Slagel of Illinois undertook the task. They reached Halbstadt just as Wrangel's army was driven to the south by the Bolsheviks. Miller and Slagel escaped with Wrangel's army, but Kratz unfortunately remained a bit too long in Halbstadt, and has not been heard from since.

By this time it had become evident that South Russia would face a serious food shortage, though the worst was not yet anticipated. All the energies of the various Mennonite organizations were now directed toward relief, and emigration for the moment was forgotten. The MCC,

in the spring of 1921, appointed A. J. Miller, who had spent a year with the Friends Service Unit in France, and had recently been transferred to the American Red Cross work in the Crimea and Constantinople, as director of Russian Mennonite Relief. Miller's first task was to get in touch with the Soviet officials in Moscow, and get official permission to carry on this work of mercy among the Mennonites. This was not easy, for the Soviet Government was decidedly suspicious of all foreign influence. By dint of infinite patience and consummate tact, however, and after repeated contacts with the Red Cross organizations, the American Friends Service, and the Hoover American Relief Administration at Paris, London and Geneva, the new director was finally able, late in 1921, to sign a contract with Kaminev in Moscow, and later in the winter with the Soviet authorities in the Ukraine, permitting the foreign Mennonites to come to the assistance of their starving brethren in Russia. Miller at the same time represented the Mennonites of Holland, who had also been negotiating through their representative Jacob Koekebakker, for a similar agreement with the Soviets, in the signing of this contract. Koekebakker was compelled to return home before he had accomplished his task; and so authorized the American director to sign for the Dutch. One of the conditions in this agreement with the Soviet authorities was that there should be no discrimination between Mennonites and others who might need help in the regions where relief work was to be carried on. The American and Dutch organizations chose as their fields of operation those areas in which the population was mostly Mennonite, thus most of their efforts were directed toward the helping of their own brethren. But within these areas all were equally taken care of, irrespective of creed or race.

A full year now had passed since the first efforts had

been made to enter Russia for relief work. The famine by this time had assumed the proportions of a major calamity. The home organizations immediately began to collect funds, and clothing, and organize the working personnel. Following the example of the American Relief Administration, ARA, with whom the American and Dutch Mennonites had become affiliated, the American Mennonite Relief workers on the field, the AMR, established feeding kitchens in the Mennonite villages, and distributed food, first among the most needy. The detail work was left to local committees selected by the villages themselves. The Dutch carried on their own work separately. Actual feeding operations, started first in the Volga area, were not begun in the Ukraine until March 1922, after starving conditions had actually arrived. By May the American kitchens were feeding twenty-five thousand persons daily. The peak was reached in August when forty thousand rations were issued daily. This work was continued for three years, though the need became constantly less after the fall of 1922. The kitchen feeding was discontinued after the summer of 1924, though director Miller remained in Russia for another two years to liquidate the work in the Ukraine, and also to direct further relief efforts in Siberia where famine conditions continued longer than in South Russia. Besides these feeding operations, many individual Mennonites in America sent food packets to friends and relatives and others in Russia. The AMR also sent some fifty Ford tractors, into the Mennonite settlements, among the first to enter the Soviet Union, to take the place of the large number of draft horses that had been stolen or confiscated during the period of the civil wars, and which were so necessary for the cultivation of the fields.

It is estimated that about one million two hundred thousand dollars were collected by the various

branches of the American Mennonites during this period for this work, and several hundred thousand by the Dutch. How many Mennonites actually died of starvation, and the indirect results of famine of course, is a matter of some difference of opinion; but much less proportionately to be sure, than among the other Russians who, as we have already noted, died by the millions. But that the help from the American and Dutch Mennonites came just in the nick of time there can be no question. Without it, the death toll would undoubtedly have been increased by the thousands, a fact which the Russian Mennonites have repeatedly acknowledged and for which they have often expressed their profound gratitude.

### **The Trek to Canada**

Although the famine may have delayed the emigration movement for several years, it only resulted in strengthening the determination of large groups of Mennonites to find refuge from their troubles in some more favorable land. The economic conditions, to be sure, were improving somewhat. The New Economic Policy (NEP) also gave some promise that the Soviet Government would proceed more cautiously and less radically in its policy of socialization of industry and agriculture than had originally been planned. But there was enough left of the whole Bolshevik program, and its philosophy of life—its complete nationalization of the land, and thorough liquidation of the large landowners, and the growing threat of division and redistribution of the smaller farms; its nationalization of all church houses and church property; complete state control of the educational system; atheistic propaganda designed to root out all consciousness of God and religion from the minds and hearts of the youth of the land; the persecution of the preachers, and religious leaders—all this was so dia-

metrically antagonistic to all that the Mennonites held sacred that compromise was impossible. Many were determined that if Bolshevism should prevail they must leave.

But where were they to go? Several countries suggested themselves. The Mennonites of Siberia inquired about the East Indies. Some thought of Mexico, but Mexico just at this time was also undergoing a revolution too much like the one in Russia to be given serious consideration. The United States, it was found prohibited the entrance of immigrants who received financial assistance from America; Canada remained, but here, too, there were difficulties. Because the Mennonites had claimed and were granted military exemption during the war, the Canadian Government, prompted by public opinion, had prohibited the further immigration of Mennonites and Hutterites. But the war was over now; the government remembered that the Mennonite immigrants of 1874 had proven themselves the best farmers in the entire dominion; and the Canadian Pacific Railroad still had vast stretches of sparsely settled prairie land in need of thrifty settlers.

And so, the newly formed Canadian Board of Colonization, under the presidency of David Toews, found little difficulty in securing a repeal of the Order in Council which had prohibited Mennonite immigration, as well as the order which had repealed the military exemption decree of 1873. Seemingly it was no more difficult either to induce the Canadian Pacific Railway to agree to transport a limited number of Mennonites to Canada on credit, with only the assurance of the Canadian Board of Colonization, CBC, that the railway company would be finally reimbursed for their outlay, as security. One condition proved a bit troublesome later on. The Canadian Government insisted upon a rigid health inspection of all pro-



posed immigrants at some European port of departure, especially for trachoma, a prevalent eye disease among south Europeans at this time.

Only one thing more was left now to make the migration possible—the consent of the Russian Government. But the Soviet authorities, not too willing to lose some of their best farmers in their attempt to revive Russian agriculture, and perhaps not too anxious to have the world know that some of their most peaceful and industrious citizens were eager to escape from the glorious possibilities of the Soviet paradise, were slow in granting the necessary passports to prospective emigrants. And furthermore, since the Canadian Government had not recognized the Soviet rule, the latter refused to grant the Canadian health inspectors the right of making their inspections in Russian ports. But a way out that satisfied both Russia and Canada was eventually found. Instead of going out by the way of the Black Sea ports which would have been the logical routes to be taken by the Mennonites of South Russia, they were routed by way of Riga with the first Canadian inspection on the Latvian side of the border; emigrants once leaving Russia were not to be sent back in case they did not pass the rigid health inspection tests of the Canadian doctors. Germany, now, for whom the Russian Mennonites had always retained a warm attachment, which was also reciprocated by Germany, and perhaps partly through the efforts of Benjamin Unruh, who in the meantime after his American tour had remained in Germany and had become the representative of both the Russian Mennonites as well as those in other parts of the world in everything that pertained to the welfare of his persecuted Russian brethren, now generously offered to provide a temporary refuge in the former military training grounds at Lechfeld, for all such Mennonite emigrants who might not be

able to pass the Canadian inspection regulations, and who at the same time could not be returned to Russia. Southampton, England became another inspection port and detention camp for rejected emigrants.

Finally after two years of tedious negotiation with the government officials and colonization societies, and patient waiting on the part of anxious prospective refugees, the way was opened for the long-awaited escape to a better land. Among the Russian Mennonites a leading part in the whole movement was taken by the two agricultural societies—the *Verband der Bürger holländischer Herkunft in der Ukraine*, BHH, in South Russia under the presidency of B. B. Janz; and the *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein*, AMLV, under the leadership of Peter Fröse, and C. F. Klassen.

The first contingent of emigrants to leave Russia in the summer of 1923, came from the Chortitza colony, and consisted largely of certain liquidated owners of former large estates nearby, once well-to-do, but now without a roof over their heads, a burden to the people among whom they had found a refuge; refugees of various sorts; preachers who had been disfranchised and cruelly persecuted; victims of the civil wars, banditry and the famine; the most conscientious religiously perhaps, and the poorest economically. Two-thirds of this first group was transported to Canada on credit of the Canadian Pacific. Coming from Chortitza, this group acted somewhat independently from the BHH, which had its headquarters in the Molotschna, and which concerned itself more largely with the matter of the mass migration of all the Mennonites, rather than any individual groups.

Although the Canadian Colonization Board was unable to meet its obligations to the Canadian Pacific in

1923, yet the railroad company agreed to an even more liberal contract for the year 1924, providing for the immigration of five thousand persons. About four thousand came this year, mostly from the Molotschna colony, and other parts of the Ukraine. Some were again left at Lechfeld and Southampton.

The detention at these temporary refugee camps of those who failed to pass the health inspection often caused real hardships. Families were separated, and the victims of trachoma, and other bodily ailments, often were detained for months and perhaps years before they were considered well enough to enter Canada—all at the expense of the Canadian Board of Colonization. During the emigration period hundreds of unfortunates had to spend more or less time at these recuperation stations. Practically all, however, in course of time reached their objective, though some after considerable delay.

In 1925 four thousand left Russia, this time from all the Mennonite settlements throughout the Soviet Republic, though most of them were again from the Ukraine. The peak was reached in 1926 with six thousand emigrants. By 1927 the movement had run its course. Less than nine hundred left that year, and only three hundred the year following. The later mass migration of 1930 was directed largely to Paraguay and Brazil though some again went to Canada. The closing of the door to further emigration was not due to any lack of desire on the part of many Mennonites to leave their native soil, nor to any lack of inducements on the part of the Canadian Pacific; for that railroad company had renewed a contract in 1927 for the importation of twenty thousand more Mennonites if they desired to come. But the Russian Government looked with disfavor upon the whole affair. Passports were becoming increasingly expensive and hard to get. They now often cost several hundred ruble per

person, instead of the five rubles per family paid by the first group to leave. Family passes had not been granted since 1924.

By 1930, it was estimated that twenty-one thousand Mennonites had been transported to Canada, nearly all with the assistance of the Canadian Pacific, about two-thirds of them on credit.

## **A Losing Struggle**

Only a small portion, it is thus seen, of those desiring to emigrate, were able to do so. The rest were doomed to remain, and salvage as much as possible of their material possessions, and their religious and cultural heritage. It was a losing fight from the start. It may be well for the reader to remember here that all Russian people alike—original Russians, Germans, and Mennonites shared the harrowing experiences recorded above, and all alike were subject to the drastic Soviet program of economic socialization and religious annihilation. If Mennonites suffered more than others it was only as they were more prosperous than the latter, and more consistently and unalterably religious; and also not to be forgotten is the fact that the program of collectivization, especially of the land, was only gradually fulfilled, due largely to the reluctance of the peasants to give up possession of their small holdings. It is estimated that as late as 1928 only a little more than two percent of the cultivated land area of Russia had been collectivized.

The large estates of Russian noblemen and Mennonite landowners, of course, were confiscated almost from the start, as well as the communal lands of the Mennonite and other German colonies. These latter were generally distributed among the poorer native peasants, often bringing into the Mennonite villages an undesirable ele-

ment that later became an important factor in the liquidation of all the distinctive features of Mennonite culture from these villages. The growing food shortage and this reluctance of the peasant to give up his small tract was responsible for the New Economic Policy which tended to slow up the whole socialization process considerably.

There was a continual reduction, however, by the state in the size of the individual farms, to make room for still more land-hungry peasants. The former model farms of one hundred and seventy-five acres among Mennonites, were reduced at first to sixty-five acres, and finally to thirty-five. The fear of further reductions, and the claim that a farm of this size was not sufficient to support a family, together with the threat to their social and religious life resulting from the importation of the native peasants into their villages were among the important causes given by the Mennonites for their desire to emigrate.

Realizing that some sort of radical change in the whole social order was inevitable and that a certain degree of collectivization was forthcoming, the Mennonite communities hoped at first that they might retain their solid and compact community life within the bounds of some sort of collective management. They thought they might be able to organize themselves into Mennonite co-operatives. The best known of these attempts was the founding of a series of agricultural co-operatives including all the Mennonite colonies of the Ukraine under the presidency of B. B. Janz in 1921, and with the somewhat cumbersome title *Verband der Bürger holländischer Herkunft in der Ukraine* already referred to as the BHH. The original purpose of this society which had been given legal status for a time by the Soviet authorities, was to revive the agricultural prosperity of the Ukraine once more after the disastrous effects of the civil wars and



famine. This mild form of cooperation, it was hoped, would satisfy the Soviet demand for collectivization. The *Verband* also took a leading part in the emigration movement, but finding that the government was displeased with these activities, it again gave itself over entirely to its original purpose.

But if the Mennonites thought that they might remain a collective state within a collective state and thus retain possession and control of their compact land areas to themselves, they were doomed to bitter disappointment. Due partly to the jealousy of the German section of the Communist party, because of envy of Mennonite industry, and the latter's refusal to admit non-Mennonites to their co-operatives, the BHH was bitterly attacked by the local and metropolitan press, with the result that finally, in 1925, the Soviet Government demanded such a thorough reorganization of the *Verband* that, if obeyed, it would entirely lose its original purpose. A little later the organization was completely liquidated.

The *All Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union*, AMLV, representing all the Mennonite settlements, has already been mentioned. This organization concerned itself largely with improving the livestock of the Mennonites, and in the selection of the best seed strains—wheat and barley, though during the emigration period the union also gave valuable assistance to that movement. In fact Peter Fröse and C. F. Klassen, the leaders, represented the Mennonites before the Soviet authorities in Moscow on every question that affected the latter's welfare—military exemption, emigration, and excessive taxation of churches and preachers, among others. This organization also had to cease its activities at the end of the NEP period in 1928, because, as the authorities said, it hindered the progress of collectivization among the Mennonites. With the introduction of the Five Year Plan under Stalin

in 1928 all hope among the Mennonites of salvaging their economic institutions vanished forever.

### **Religious Freedom Restricted**

One of the main objectives of the Bolshevik program was the complete destruction of the power of the established Greek Orthodox church as an institution, on the ground that the church had always been one of the chief supporters of the old economic and social order under the czars. One of the first official acts of the Soviet regime, in 1918, was the complete separation of church and state. The priests and other ecclesiastical officials of the hierarchy were taken off the payroll of the state, disfranchised, practically outlawed, and set adrift in the world to make a living as best they could. Soon after, the vast property holdings of the church were confiscated, the buildings nationalized, and rented back to the former owners at a high rent, and taxed heavily. Many of the churches were closed as being superfluous, and turned into anti-religious museums, social clubs or public offices. Church houses used for worship had to be registered, and worship could not be held in a building not officially registered. Not every Mennonite village had a meeting-house. It was customary frequently to hold meetings in the school houses. This now was forbidden. Sunday as a day of religious observance was abolished; it was no longer even a holiday. Church officials, priests and ministers who protested too strongly against this ruthless liquidation of church property and religious freedom were arbitrarily arrested as counterrevolutionists and imprisoned, fined, exiled or shot by the thousands.

Not only the established church but religion itself as "an opiate of the people" was to be entirely rooted out of the hearts and minds of the people as rapidly as possible. And so the anti-religious crusade was not only directed

against the state church, but against all the other churches as well. Mennonites shared all the persecution of the rest of the churches, and were equally subjected to the same anti-church and anti-religious legislation.

Especially vicious was the treatment accorded priests and ministers. Disfranchised and outlawed, they were denied citizenship in the new order, and as such they were not entitled to bread cards, the right to purchase goods at the Communist stores, and such other privileges as were almost absolutely essential to life during the trying times of the early years. If they had any property they were excessively taxed. Preachers could not be teachers, which was especially serious for many of the Mennonite preachers, who earned their living by teaching. They could not join the guilds and co-operatives into which finally all industry and labor was organized. These disabilities applied to their families also. In fact preachers were practically outlawed and marked for destruction, a dangerous profession in later years. Preachers and teachers were heavily represented in all the emigrations of the Mennonites during the whole period.

The churches finally were denied the right to exercise any organized charitable work, hospitals, poor relief, children's homes, insurance or any of the various philanthropic work which was such a common part of the Mennonite churches in Russia.

Realizing that the only hope of making Russia a nation of the godless would be to educate the youth in atheism, the Soviet Government took over entire control of the schools, liquidated private church schools, forbade all religious instruction in the schools, and of youth under eighteen in the churches. To the Mennonites to whom religious instruction of their young people was one of their major religious concerns, this became a special ground for complaint. This refusal of the right to teach

their children religion may have been one of the reasons for the increased interest during this period among the Mennonites in choral singing, which might in a way, by the use of religious chorals and others of a high moral content become a substitute among the young people for the religious instruction denied them. But in the end even attendance at these choral renditions was forbidden the young people as well as teachers in the public schools.

The whole school curriculum was changed under the new system. Instead of teaching the usual cultural subjects, teachers now were supposed to be propagandists for the new order, and agents for carrying out the agricultural and industrial program of the local Soviets. Under the influence somewhat of the educational theories of the American, John Dewey, and his group, the school became decidedly child-centered. Children were given great freedom in the choice of subject matter, in the discipline of the school, and even sometimes in the choice of the teacher. Church and parents lost all control of the education of their children. Mennonite teachers in the Mennonite colonies were gradually replaced by non-Mennonite atheists, especially in those former Mennonite villages where the Mennonite population had entirely disappeared or where Mennonites had lost control of their affairs through the influx of native Russians or non-Mennonite Germans. Finally, under Stalin, all teachers had to sign the atheistic questionnaires sent them. A few Mennonites signed and remained in service, but the great majority refused, and lost their jobs. That the propaganda for atheism throughout Russia was having its telling effect is evidenced by the claim made in 1932 by the president of the Union of the Militant Godless, that at that time forty percent of all the members of trade unions were godless, and that more than half of the children of the nation denied the existence of God. The percentage,

among the Mennonites, let us hope was, no doubt, greatly below this.

### A Petition that Miscarried

Of course not all these regulations were rigidly enforced everywhere before 1928. Something was left to the local governmental authorities. In fact during the NEP period, along in 1924-25, it seemed for a time that the Mennonites might even recover a measure of their former religious freedom. What the Mennonites hoped for is perhaps well expressed in the following petition sent to Moscow on May 23, 1924, by the *Kommission für Kirchenangelegenheiten* (KfK).

- 1 Complete freedom of religious worship and assembly for large and small.
- 2 The unconditional right of children and young people to assemble for religious worship and instruction and choral renditions.
- 3 The establishing of Mennonite children's homes under religious training.
- 4 Repeal of the special taxes on church houses and preachers, and the right to erect new church buildings.
- 5 Permission to furnish the churches with a much needed supply of Bibles and other religious literature and periodicals.
- 6 Bible training courses for the ministry.
- 7 The schools to follow at least a neutral course, permitting neither religious nor anti-religious propaganda.
- 8 Exemption of Mennonites from military service and military drill in lieu of some other non-combatant, constructive service; and the privilege of substituting an affirmation for the oath wherever an oath is officially required.



Even though the time seemed propitious for making them, only one of these demands was ever granted, the permission to import a certain number of Bibles.

Through the efforts of the KfK, however, permission was granted the following year to hold a session of the general *Bundes-Konferenz* in Moscow, the first since the end of the war; also permission at the same time to publish a religious journal *Unser Blatt* as well as to establish a Bible school at Moscow. The Bible school never materialized, however, since it must be located in Moscow, far removed from the country communities of the Mennonites, and consequently of doubtful practical value. *Unser Blatt*, too, lasted only a few years, being forced to suspend by government order with the advent of the Stalin regime.

This general conference, *Allgemeine Bundes-Konferenz*, called with the special consent of the Soviet Government, forced to hold its sessions in the capital city, under the direct surveillance of government representatives, the first of its kind since the close of the war, and with the exception of a Ukrainian All Mennonite Congress held the next year at Melitopol, the last general meeting of the Mennonites ever to be held in Russia, devoted its efforts largely to a discussion of the various problems then threatening the very existence of the Mennonite church, and the religious freedom of its members, such problems as were listed in the petition just mentioned, and in addition these questions—the need of religious instruction of the children in the home, the need of consecrated spiritual leadership, Christian marriage, visiting evangelists, religious songs in worship, the cultivation of choral societies and the training of capable directors, Bible study among the membership, and the missionary enterprises of the church.

This conference marked the peak of Mennonite high

hopes and expectations of ever rebuilding their spiritual life and religious institutions again. The five year plan was just in the offing.

The Mennonites also lost political control of their local government during this period. The simple and economical rule of the village *Schulze* and the district *Oberschulze* with their few assistants was replaced by a large number of inefficient and unnecessary foreign Bolshevik henchmen who had very little knowledge of the art of government, and no sympathy for the governed. Much of the detailed work of carrying out the policies of the central Soviet authorities at Moscow was left to the local governments. But even in the Mennonite villages where the population might still be almost entirely Mennonite, the majority had little to say to such questions as were submitted to the people for decision. In the first place, more or less of foreign settlers had been introduced into the villages by the land liquidations and redistributions. Former *kulaks*, preachers, teachers often, and many church leaders had been denied the right to vote, with the result that the political management of the villages often fell entirely into the hands of this foreign Bolshevik minority entirely out of sympathy with Mennonite ideals.

### **Military Exemption**

After the Revolution of 1917, Mennonites and other non-resistant groups negotiated with the government for exemption from military service. In October, 1918, Trotzky issued a decree according to which religious conscientious objectors who, upon investigation, were found sincere could be exempted from military service to render some form of alternative service.

In the meantime, those having religious scruples against participation in war organized the United Council of Religious Fellowships and Groups at Moscow under

the chairmanship of Vladimir Tchertkov, a follower of L. Tolstoy. This body served as an intermediary between the government and the conscientious objectors to war. Peter Froese of the AMLV was a Mennonite representative in this United Council. Its function was to issue certificates to the individual conscientious objector with which he appeared before the People's Courts to be examined. The Council succeeded, during the Russian Civil War of 1919-1920, in freeing some eight thousand conscientious objectors, many of whom were Mennonites, from military service. In December, 1920, this procedure was discontinued and the United Council was forced to cease its activity. However, the People's Courts continued during the NEP period to examine and exempt conscientious objectors. The KfK and the ministers assisted their men of draft age in obtaining exemption from military service.

Although the early laws provided for exemption from military service, these laws were not universally applied. Unknown hundreds of conscientious objectors suffered imprisonment during the brief period of the functioning of the United Council. It was later discovered that more than two hundred conscientious objectors had been shot because of their refusal to bear arms. These cases, however, came to the attention of the United Council too late for it to be of assistance.

Article 133 of the Stalin Constitution of 1936 states, "The defense of the Fatherland is the sacred duty of every citizen of the U.S.S.R." By this time all organized congregational activity was being dissolved, as most of the leaders were being sent to concentration camps. When the second World War broke out, exemption from military service had ceased. The men who were still available in Mennonite settlements were drafted into military service or into labor battalions.

Those young men who were granted exemption from military service after the Revolution did not enjoy the privileges of the young men serving in hospital and forestry units prior to this time. They were now classified with the "enemies" of the people and forced to do labor in secluded areas, similar to the concentration camps. They lived and worked under the watchful eye of trained communists. The chief purpose of this arrangement was to break the resistance of the CO's and make them willing to enlist in the army.

A number of years before World War II this alternative service had been discontinued. The total impact of the witness and suffering of the Mennonite CO's under the Communist regime will probably never become known.

### **The Five-Year Plan**

Frequent reference has been made in the pages just preceding of the Stalin Five Year Plan, and its important bearing on the fate of the Mennonites. This plan did not introduce a new program of social theory but rather inaugurated an extensive drive to hurry to completion the original program of socialization and collectivization of all industry and agriculture, especially the latter, which, as we have seen, was given a breathing spell in the early twenties because of the opposition of the peasants. By 1928, as noted earlier, nearly ninety-eight percent of the land in Russia was still practically controlled by small independent farmers. Agriculture now as well as the remaining industry must come completely under the control of the state within five years.

Special attention in this program was directed to the *kulaks*, as farmers who owned two horses while the rest owned one might be called. A common method of exiling these farmers was to levy upon them contributions of

grain or money beyond what they could produce, and then to confiscate their property; and to expel them from the community. At first the term *kulak* was applied only to the larger landholders, but later it was stretched to include everybody who was in the least opposed to the collectivization program and so expressed himself—preachers, teachers, or landless.

The selection of the *kulaks* to be expelled was left largely to the local village authorities; and since in the Mennonite villages the control had been seized by non-Mennonite communists, it was evident that the number of *kulaks* among the industrious Mennonite farmers, and devoted preachers and teachers would be unusually large. In the village of Chortitza, in May of 1931, a meeting was called to vote out the remaining *kulaks* in the village. The communist contingent of the village, with a minority of the population, but claiming two-thirds of the votes cast, voted to expel the remaining nine once-prosperous Mennonite farmers. Hundreds of thousands all over Russia and hundreds, and perhaps thousands of Mennonites were classed as *kulaks*, arrested and imprisoned, expelled from their homes on short notice to eke out an existence as best they could; or exiled to the forests of the far north or the vast wastes of Siberia, condemned to hard labor, gathering woodpulp for export, building a new Siberian railroad, or digging in the mines. They were sent from southern concentration camps by the freight train loads, sometimes whole families, often men torn from their families on a few days' notice with insufficient food or clothing, little provision for either health or comfort. Many died of starvation, disease or exposure. Liquidation of the *kulaks* became a major sport among the Soviet authorities.

Religious liberty also was further restricted. All the former anti-religious regulations were rigidly en-



forced. More churches were closed. Sunday had been abolished not only as a day of worship but as a holiday. Religious instruction of youth was prohibited. Such preachers as had not already emigrated had been sent into exile; and newly elected ones hesitated to accept the dangerous obligation.

### **The Moscow Flight**

It is not surprising then that many Mennonites under these conditions, those who suffered most and those who were most concerned for the religious fate of their children and themselves, should grasp any straw that promised the least bit of hope of escape from this unbearable situation. But there seemed little hope; the Soviet Government by 1927 had practically ceased giving passports, without which emigration was impossible. But just at this time a group of some seventy Mennonites from Siberia, which was again suffering famine conditions as a result of dry weather and heavy governmental requisitions, had fled to Moscow, blindly trusting that somehow they might find in the capital city the relief denied them at home. Strangely enough, and quite unexpectedly, perhaps, because of their very audacity and persistency, the Soviet authorities granted them passports with permission to leave the country.

This news, brought back to the home communities in Siberia, spread like wildfire among the Mennonites and other German colonists. Quietly so as not to arouse too much suspicion, many Mennonites now began to dispose of their personal possessions so as to get enough money to take them to Moscow and purchase passports, hoping that somehow the American and Dutch brethren might provide for their transportation needs beyond that. Some, in their hurry to get away, did not even sell all their personal property, leaving their furniture in their homes,

and turning their cattle out into the meadows. A mass movement on a somewhat smaller scale was also set in motion among the Mennonites in the Ukraine.

Before the Moscow government knew what was happening about a thousand Mennonite families, mostly from Siberia and some hundreds of Lutherans and some Catholics, had gathered together in the cheap lodging houses and temporary huts on the outskirts of the city, hoping that they, too, might find some way of escape to the new world. The first reports in the papers spoke of six thousand refugees, later, of ten thousand and finally, of thirteen thousand.

This dramatic attempt of citizens of the Soviet Republic, which still boasted that it was the freest country in the world, and just at a time when the economic conditions and general dissatisfaction with the Soviet regime had reached a critical period, was given wide publicity in the world press. To the Russian Government it was as unwelcome as it was unexpected. Steps were immediately taken to stem the tide. Government agents were sent into the Mennonite settlements to discourage the mass movement; ticket agents were forbidden to sell tickets to Moscow.

At the same time, those in Moscow were requested to return to their homes. Requested, besides, to sign a statement that they were leaving of their own free will. Those refusing to sign were packed into crowded musty rooms, and the heat turned on until the unlucky victims were glad to sign anything if only they might be relieved from *this* torture. Police brutally rounded up unwilling refugees, herded them together into freight cars and shipped them, like so many cattle, to far-off Siberia or South Russia, without regard to food, clothing or ordinary sanitary precautions. Families were separated in the hurry of the loading, some going to one settlement, and other

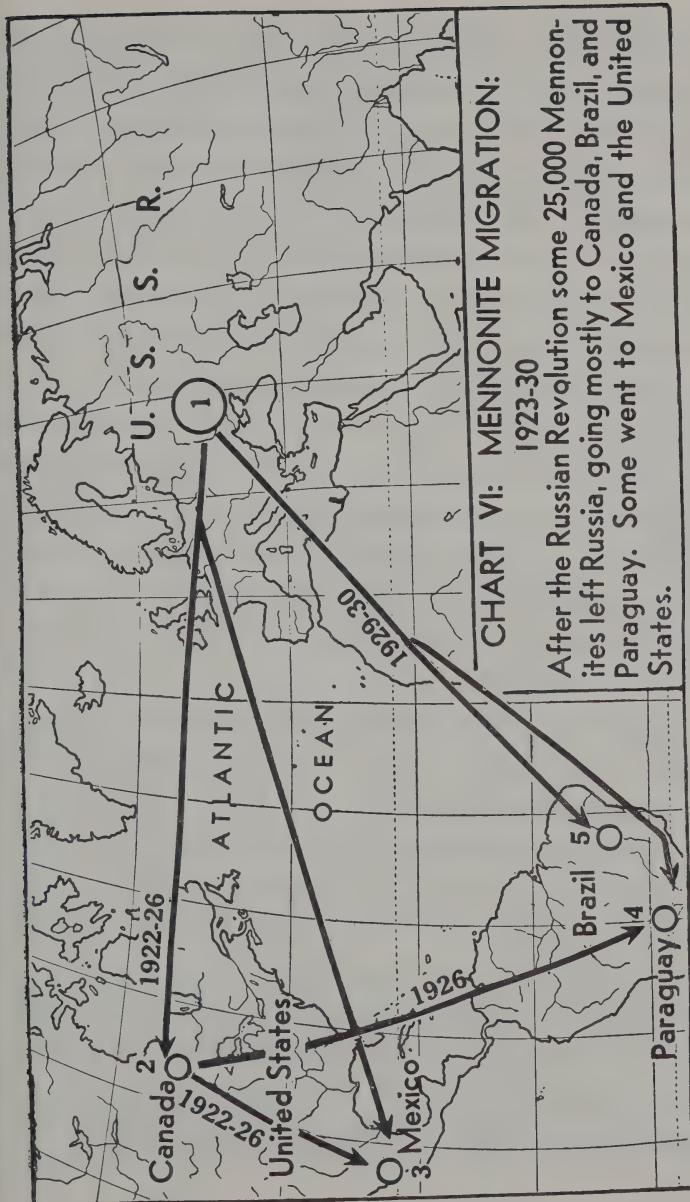
members to another sometimes far removed. The cars were closed, and stops made only at long intervals. Many of the passengers were sick from exposure and neglect. Children were born all along the way; sometimes mother and child, both without proper medical care, died. The dead, and sometimes the sick, were unloaded at the first station, and thrown out to be disposed of by the local inhabitants. When these refugees, such as survived, did finally get back home they found themselves worse off than they had been months before. They were without household furniture, farm equipment or live stock. Many found their homes had been occupied by strangers. Life was harder than ever, and it was only with the help of their friends and neighbors that they could start again at all.

The plight, too, of those remaining at Moscow was becoming increasingly desperate. Their funds, after months of patient waiting, were running low, and they were still not in sight of either the necessary passports or the help from abroad which would transport them to Canada. But the whole world had by this time become interested in the fate of this group of pious people seeking to escape religious persecution under the red terror. Germany especially, regarding these German-speaking Mennonites and Lutherans as being more German than Russian was very sympathetic toward them. The German Cabinet on November 19, 1929, decided to intercede in behalf of the refugees with the Russian Government; and the Reichstag voted a substantial sum of money to aid an emigration project, and offered a temporary stopping place in Germany for the refugees until they could find a permanent home perhaps somewhere in America. The German Red Cross, too, as well as other philanthropic organizations interested themselves in the project. President Hindenburg donated two hundred thousand marks

out of his own private fortune to the cause. Even the League of Nations gave the matter some attention, though no material assistance. It was due no doubt largely to the intercession of the German Government that some six thousand of these refugees, about four thousand of whom were Mennonites, came to Germany to await there their further disposition.

Of course the Mennonites of Germany took a keen interest in this whole movement. Through the efforts of Benjamin Unruh, who had already so effectively represented the foreign Mennonites in the earlier emigration, ably assisted by E. Händiges, editor of the *Mennonitische Blätter*, which gave the whole matter wide publicity, and Christian Neff of South Germany, an effective relief work was organized, which furnished the destitute strangers from Russia much-needed clothing, food, and medical care, as well as spiritual comfort in three former military barracks in North Germany, which the German Government so generously offered as a temporary resting place for the exiles.

The Mennonites in other parts of the world, too, felt a deep concern for the fate of their Russian brethren. The question was not solved permanently when the German Government offered the Russians a temporary resting place. Germany itself was too hard-pressed to furnish them a satisfactory permanent home. The question still remaining for those concerned with a permanent solution was what was to be their final destination. For the purpose of discussing this, as well as a number of other questions still confronting the various Mennonite relief organizations of the world, Benjamin Unruh called an All Mennonite Relief Conference representing all of these organizations to meet in Danzig in the spring of 1930. This was the second Mennonite World Conference. Delegates were present from all the large Mennonite settlements





except Russia. The MCC of the United States, delegated Harold S. Bender, then a student at Heidelberg, to represent it; David Toews, and C. F. Klassen spoke for the Canadian Mennonites; S. H. N. Gorter represented the Mennonites of Holland; Benjamin Unruh, E. Händiges of Elbing, Christian Neff, A. P. Fast of Berlin, a Russian refugee, appeared for Germany. The case for the Mennonites still left in Russia as well as the Russian emigrants in various parts of the world, was ably represented by recent Russian refugees among several of the delegations from Canada, Germany and Holland.

The whole field of Mennonite colonization and relief the world over was discussed at this conference—the status of the Canadian Mennonites who had recently gone to Mexico and Paraguay; the refugees still marooned at Harbin, China; the prospects of further migration from Russia, the problem of continued help for the twenty thousand Russian Mennonites who were still in need in Canada; as well as the main objective of the Conference the disposition of four thousand Mennonites still guests of the German Government.

Emigration to the United States was still out of the question, and was not considered by the delegates. By this time, too, largely because of an economic depression, the door had been practically closed to Canada, except for a limited number of immigrants who might have close relatives in Canada, who would assume complete responsibility for the support of the newcomers. Mexico was not considered.

Only South America remained as a possibility. The German Government favored Santa Catharina province in Brazil, because of the large German settlement already located there. The Hanseatic Corporation with large land holdings in the region, warmly seconded the choice. The Government generously offered to advance the transpor-

tation costs and enough money for the first year's support to all those desiring to migrate to Brazil. There was one objection to the Brazilian adventure presenting itself to such of the Mennonites as may have had conscientious scruples against military service—Brazil did not guarantee exemption from military service to prospective Mennonite settlers as Paraguay had done. About one thousand took advantage of the German Government offer; and since these knew that they would not enjoy exemption from war service it is reasonable to conclude that those making this choice were not among the most scrupulous on this question. At the time of the Amsterdam World Conference in 1936 a large part of this debt to the German Government was still due. The Dutch Mennonites have taken a special interest in the Brazilian Mennonites as their special field of Mennonite relief work. They furnished money for the purchase of livestock at the start, and later money for the establishing of schools.

The American Mennonites favored Paraguay as a possible home for the refugees, partly because a few years before a Canadian colony had already been established there in the Gran Chaco, and especially because of the liberal terms offered by the Paraguayan Government, including exemption from military service, and a large degree of local autonomy in matters of education and language. About two thousand colonists, including several hundred a few years later from Harbin, China, were located near the Canadian settlement, largely financed by the American Mennonites.

Perhaps about one thousand of these Moscow refugees, temporary guests of Germany, found their way to Canada, and a small number remained in Germany.

### **The Harbin Refugees**

In the meantime some of the Siberians had sought

escape by way of the Pacific instead of the Atlantic. In the early twenties a number of the victims of the famine in western Siberia, in the hope that they might better their condition in the east, started a new settlement along the Amur River in the Far East. But they were doomed to disappointment, and under the Stalin regime some of them crossed the Amur into China, and now about one thousand, including a number of Lutherans and a few Catholics, were marooned at Harbin, China, hoping that they, too, might find their way to the promised land of Canada. Without food or clothing, and no money, outlawed by the Russians and not altogether welcomed by the Chinese, their plight was desperate, and they were able to exist only by the friendly assistance of the German contingent of the city's population.

But these found entrance into Canada even more difficult than did their fellow refugees from Moscow. In addition to all the other handicaps was this one, that they had no passports, and Canada had decided, in 1927, that she would accept no immigrants without passports. At this point the German Government partly through the efforts of Benjamin Unruh again, and the German consul at Harbin, came to the rescue of these Russian Germans, promising to furnish them with passports, and assuming all the obligations involved in such guarantee. But as already seen, Canada by this time was not open to further mass immigration under any circumstances.

Through the sympathetic efforts of the American consul at Harbin, two hundred were permitted under the quota system, to come to the United States, aided of course by the American Mennonites. These arrived in the spring of 1930, and were helped to a new start in life in Washington and California by their American brethren. It was not until several years later that the rest were able to leave China. The Nansen International Office for

Refugees under the sponsorship of the League of Nations finally interested itself in their behalf, and it was under the auspices of this organization that, in 1932, three hundred and seventy-three Mennonites found their way to Paraguay, and three hundred and ninety-seven Lutherans to Brazil. Two years later one hundred and eighty Mennonites from Harbin and one hundred Lutherans and Catholics were located in Brazil.

Incidentally the intervention of the League of Nations in behalf of the Mennonite emigration to Paraguay raised a question of considerable international significance. In the meeting of the Council of the League in September 1931, the Chinese delegate called attention to the plight of the Harbin refugees, requesting that the League help them to find a permanent home. The delegate from Paraguay generously offered them a home in the Chaco in Paraguay if their transportation expenses could be guaranteed. The German delegate, Count Bernstorff, remembered as the pre-war ambassador to the United States, whose government was already greatly interested in the whole question, thereupon thanked the Paraguayan delegate for the generous offer.

### Wave of Exile 1929-40

The roots of the flight to Moscow in 1929 were the radical collectivization, industrialization, and the liquidation of the so-called *kulaks*. This was accompanied by mercilessly exiling millions of people to Siberia and other almost uninhabitable places. How this affected the Mennonite population is best illustrated in the case of the Chortitza settlement. From this settlement with a Mennonite population of some twelve thousand, about fifteen hundred, mostly men, were exiled from 1929-1940. Hardly any of them returned and most of them have, no doubt, meanwhile perished. This man power was

shifted from populated to unpopulated areas under the pretext of political accusations while the real motive was usually to obtain labor to build up and develop some industries in remote areas. It was a part of the plan for which America praised Stalin, namely, that he had moved industries beyond the Ural Mountains before Hitler moved into the Ukraine. This wave of exile swept not only the Chortitza and other Mennonite settlements but also the Russian population in general.

### Evacuation in 1941

Immediately after the beginning of the invasion of the Ukraine by the German Army the Soviet Government organized an evacuation of all population of German background beyond the Ural Mountains. In the fall of 1941 the so-called German Volga Republic with a population of some 350,000 was evacuated. All people of German background were to be removed before the German Army approached. The *Neu-Samara* Mennonite settlement on the Volga was also entirely evacuated. This must have been the fate of most Mennonite as well as other German settlements northeast of the Ukraine.

In the Ukraine the Soviet Government did not succeed in totally evacuating the Mennonite settlements. Most of the Mennonite settlements east of the Dnieper River, however, including such large settlements as the Molotschna, Memrik, and others, were almost totally evacuated to Siberia. In the Molotschna settlement most of the men between 15 and 65 had been sent to Siberia in the wave of exile prior to the German invasion of the Ukraine. Now the women and children were sent east, naturally to different places. This was still, however, the era of the German *Blitzkrieg* and the Russians did not succeed in getting all of the trains loaded with evacuees from stations like Halbstadt. Then too, some of the remaining men of the Molotschna settlement were be-



ing used to dig trenches west of the Dnieper River. This accounts for the fact that in spite of all precautions of the Soviet Government some of the Molotschna Mennonites remained in the German occupied Ukraine and later came to the Americas as displaced persons.

The Chortitza settlement, located west of the Dnieper River, also was to be evacuated eastward. However, because the German Army moved in so swiftly and the crossing of the Dnieper River increased the difficulty of evacuation, only some thirteen hundred out of a total population of fourteen thousand were moved. This explains why most of the Mennonites who have been moved to North and South America after World War II are from the Chortitza settlement.

### **During the German Occupation**

Since the German Army moved into Russia not only as conqueror but also as "liberator" of those who were of German background, they were treated comparatively well for the short period of occupation. This was especially true as long as the administration was in the hands of the *Wehrmacht*. When Himmler's SS (Storm Troopers) took over the administration, changes took place.

Agriculture had been collectivized long before the German Army came. The German administration did not radically turn to private ownership, mainly because there was not enough machinery and horse power to accomplish this in a short time. And yet personal initiative was immediately rewarded.

The religious life was revived, churches were opened again, ministers elected, religious instruction was given and baptismal services took place. The schools were once more conducted more in harmony with Mennonite principles, although it gradually became noticeable that

the National Socialist faith in *Blut und Boden* was to be substituted for the Mennonite heritage. One thing was certain, the German language, which had been abandoned in all schools in 1937, was once more re-instated and the teachers were predominantly Mennonite. The Chortitza *Zentralschule* could even commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of its existence in 1942. All this proved to be only a short period of grace before the final blow. Meanwhile, the seemingly invincible German Army had been defeated at Stalingrad and Moscow, and with it began the unprecedented retreat westward accompanied by a mass of the civilian population who preferred an uncertain future in a defeated Germany to the yoke under Stalin.

### The Trek Westward

In the fall of 1943 another evacuation of the Mennonite settlements occurred. This time the move was not eastward where most of the husbands and sons were, but westward. In September, the Molotschna settlement—whatever was left of it—was evacuated. In an endless trek beginning at Halbstadt, crossing the Dnieper River, halting for a few weeks at the Sagradovka settlement, women drove horses and wagons with what was left of their families and possessions toward the Polish border and Prussia whence their forefathers had come nearly hundred and fifty years before. Under constant attack of the Red Army and guerillas, from the air and on the ground, and with the approaching winter at hand they suffered indescribably.

The fate of the Chortitza settlement was somewhat easier. From September 28 to October 20, 1943, some twelve thousand were taken to Germany by train. The transport usually consisted of fifty freight cars

carrying approximately twelve hundred people. Most of them arrived at their destination within ten days. The village of Chortitza itself, the oldest Mennonite village in the Ukraine, was evacuated October 1. An eyewitness gives this report about the last hours that he spent in this village:

The village of Chortitza was evacuated October 1. I stayed there until October 16. During the night of October 14 the Dneprostroy Dam, near Einlage, was dynamited for the second time. The retreating Russians had dynamited it the first in August, 1941. During the occupation the Germans had rebuilt it. The front was only five kilometers away when I left Chortitza. A deathly silence prevailed on that Saturday morning when I drove through the streets of Chortitza for the last time. During the night a rain had fallen and the sunrise was beautiful when I left that apparently sleeping village. I travelled in the direction of Dnepropetrovsk (formerly Ekaterinoslav), turned to Nikolaifeld, and continued to Nikopol. What a beautiful sight it was to see the promising fields of winter wheat put out by our people. Those who had sowed them were far, far away on an endless journey.

Most of these evacuees were scheduled to be settled not far from the region from which their forefathers had come 150 years ago, a place called Warthegau, in Upper Silesia and other places. In most cases plans failed to materialize or were of short duration. The German Reich was crumbling and the Red Army was pushing westward. In January, 1945, the latter entered Germany proper and a general mass movement of refugees further westward, started.

### **The Refugees in Post-war Germany**

The onslaught of the Red Army and the general collapse of Germany caused an indescribable panic during which all who could move pushed westward by any means available, mostly by foot.

Even though it was not known that Germany would be partitioned into zones nor where these zones would run, there was definitely a subconscious urge to proceed as far west as possible, regardless of winter and the danger of attack. In spite of this, many Mennonites found themselves in the Russian zone of occupation because the Red Army had overtaken them. Their fate was sealed—Siberia. However, an unspeakable fear caused some to cross the zones into western Germany or the American sector of Berlin, bravely risking their lives in the venture.

Even though exact figures on the total number of Mennonites evacuated to Germany are not available it is, however, estimated that the number could have been approximately thirty-five thousand. From the Chortitza settlement alone there must have been some twelve thousand. When the Mennonite refugees in the western zones had been gathered into displaced persons camps the total was about twelve thousand. Thus, if the above estimate is correct, more than twenty thousand had been forcibly repatriated. Naturally, they were not sent to their homes in the Ukraine, not only because these homes had been destroyed, but also because it was the previous intention of the Soviet Government to send them beyond the Ural Mountains.

### **Without a Home**

Although there are many thousands of Mennonites left in Russia, there is hardly a known settlement or congregation still intact. There are only a few families in their former homes living and probably none that have not been broken up. Members of the once prosperous settlements are now scattered all over Russia, especially the northern and eastern parts. One member of a family may be in the

Arctic Circle, one in Siberia, one in Paraguay, and one in Canada. In most cases no reunion in this life can be expected. All this was the result of six particular turbulent times unleashing themselves upon our Mennonite settlements of Russia:

1. The Civil War of 1917-1920 and the famine of 1921-22.
2. The liquidation of *kulaks* and the collectivization, 1928-1933.
3. The purges and exiles of 1936-1940.
4. The evacuation eastward at the beginning of World War II, 1941.
5. Evacuation westward by the German Army, 1943.
6. The repatriation by the Red Army since 1945.

Step by step, the once prosperous communities disintegrated. Never since the days of the martyrs have the Mennonites suffered as much as during the twentieth century in Russia.

### **Toward a New Home**

Almost insurmountable obstacles had to be overcome in order to gather the Mennonite refugees in camps, obtain permission for them to leave Germany, find a country that would be willing to take them, arrange and finance transportation, and handle innumerable difficulties that presented themselves. With the cooperation of a large staff of Mennonite Central Committee relief workers, the International Refugee Organization, and the American and British occupational authorities these seemingly impossible things were made possible. Since that now famous train with 1,125 left Berlin and passed through the Russian zone of occupation to Bremerhaven and the *Volendam* left Bremerhaven February 1, 1947, with 2,305 refugees destined for the Chaco, Paraguay, this number has been more than doubled. In addition,



about six thousand refugees from Russia have meanwhile been reunited with their relatives in Canada. Thus, twelve thousand Mennonite refugees from Russia in Germany found new homes in Paraguay and Canada. They experienced hardships, missed their loved ones, but most of them faced the future with hope and faith in God who led them to a new home.

Summarizing the migrations of the Mennonites from Russia to America we find that the first group came to the prairie states and provinces of the United States and Canada in 1874 and after, numbering some eighteen thousand. The second migration took place after World War I when from 1923-1927 some twenty-one thousand came to Canada, and from 1929-30 some three thousand went to Paraguay and Brazil. The third migration of Mennonites from Russia took place after World War II when some twelve thousand Mennonites came to Paraguay and Canada, about half going to each country. Of the last two waves of migrations the United States accepted only a negligible number.

### **Russia Today**

Since the death of Stalin (1953) some changes in the political and religious life of Soviet Russia have become noticeable. Thousands of letters are reaching Mennonites in Canada from their relatives in Soviet Russia, some of which are published in *Der Bote* and the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. Letters and even Bibles reach the Mennonites in Soviet Russia. In some areas religious revivals are taking place. Although the Mennonites are scattered and are not officially registered as a religious group, worship services take place in certain localities, either in connection with Baptist churches or independently. Some exiled people have been freed and families have been reunited. The outlook has become brighter than at any other time since 1929.

AMERICA



# IX

## FIRST SETTLEMENTS

### NEW YORK

The first Mennonites to come to America were stray Dutch traders and colonists who accompanied their fellow countrymen from Holland to their possessions in the new world in the early days when New York was still New Netherlands. The term Anabaptist, undoubtedly Mennonite, is frequently found in the early colonial records of New Netherlands. The term Mennonite itself is found first in a report of the religious conditions in the first Dutch settlement made in the new world found in the writings of a French Jesuit traveler, Father Jogues. In a letter dated 1643, describing the *Manhate* settlement he enumerates among the religious groups—"Calvinists, Catholics, English Puritans, Lutherans and Anabaptists here called *Menists*." In a later document, of 1657, *Mennonists* are reported at Gravesend, Long Island. Beyond these bare items, however, nothing is known concerning these first comers of the Mennonite faith.

A few years later, in 1663, we glean a few more scraps of information regarding a third settlement, a Dutch Mennonite colony led by the social reformer Pieter Cornelis Plockhoy of Zierkzee. This colony, however, as already noted in an earlier chapter, after a precarious existence of scarcely a year, was completely destroyed by an English marauding expedition along the shores of the present state of Delaware during the war between England and Holland in 1664.

## GERMANTOWN

The first permanent Mennonite colony in America was that established at Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1683, by a group of Germans of Dutch ancestry from the town of Crefeld, and surrounding region along the Lower Rhine near the Dutch border. This colony owed its existence to two forces—religious intolerance, and Quaker missionary zeal.

Mennonites at the close of the seventeenth century had not yet secured entire religious liberty. The day of the stake and the rack, to be sure, were past; but even in Crefeld, which was one of the most liberal of German cities toward religious dissenters, they were still compelled, as noted in an earlier chapter, to erect their house of worship on a back alley in order that they might not attract public attention. Active propaganda was forbidden. Special taxes were levied against them. Frequently they were subjected to extortion at the hands of petty, but greedy lords upon whose estates they lived. The Quakers especially, of whom there were now several congregations in the cities along the Lower Rhine, were abused because of their aggressive efforts in extending their faith.

It will be remembered that between 1655 and 1680 a number of Quakers from England, including both Fox and Penn, had visited northwest Germany and Netherlands repeatedly in the interest of their cause. These were especially well received by the Mennonites, among whom the Quakers gained a number of converts in many of the Mennonite centers along the Rhine, including Crefeld and Kriegsheim, the two regions from which the first Mennonites and Mennonite-Quakers migrated to



Pennsylvania.\* It was to these Mennonite-Quakers and their Mennonite friends and relatives that Penn first made his appeal for German immigrants to his newly inherited colony of Pennsylvania. In 1682, Jacob Telner, a Mennonite merchant of Amsterdam, who had visited New York several times, and who was acquainted with the London Quakers, together with five other Mennonites and Quakers from Crefeld and surrounding towns, purchased eighteen thousand acres of land in Pennsylvania for the purpose of founding a colony. About the same time, too, a group of Pietists from Frankfurt am Main, under the leadership of Francis Daniel Pastorius, established the Frankfort Land Company which purchased forty thousand acres north and west of Philadelphia. It was from these two groups that the actual settlers purchased most of their land.

Soon after, on October 6, 1683, a group of thirteen families, one Mennonite and twelve Mennonite-Quakers, from Crefeld and the surrounding region, all with Dutch names, some well-known in early Mennonite history, arrived at Philadelphia on board the ship Concord. They immediately proceeded north several miles to a place selected for them by Pastorius, who had preceded them by several months, and founded Germantown, not only the first permanent Mennonite, but the first German colony in America.

Francis Daniel Pastorius, the Pietist, not a Mennonite, the agent of the Frankfort Land Company, became the chief historian of the colony; but his role as founder of Germantown has perhaps been overemphasized. As representative of the Frankfort Land Company he served

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\* By Mennonite-Quakers we mean German Quakers who had been Mennonites originally but had been converted to Quakerism by Quaker missionaries in Germany before they came to America.

his company well, and disposed of much of their land from time to time. But he had no hand in the organizing of the Crefeld group, and there is no evidence that he had any part in the European movement which led to the actual settlement of Germantown by the Mennonites and the Mennonite-Quakers. He served the colony well, however, in many capacities in course of time, primarily as legal adviser, scrivener, as the first magistrate, and finally for many years as school teacher. Being the author of many letters and treatises in which he does not hesitate to speak freely of his own activities it is only natural that in the absence of other literary remains of the group, the figure of Pastorius should loom larger in the history of the settlement than his real importance would warrant. Might he not more appropriately be called the historian rather than the founder of Germantown?

These first Mennonite and Quaker colonists were mostly mechanics and linen weavers, unlike later Mennonites who came to America, and "not given much to agriculture." They founded a village, cultivated the soil on a small scale at first, but soon turned to weaving as their chief industry. Although they passed through a brief period of hardships, they were free from Indian dangers and disease epidemics, fatal to so many colonial experiments. Soon other settlers followed these first thirteen families, many of whom located on the lands about the village. By 1700 the following family names, including the first comers, appear in the early records—*op den Graeff, Lensen, Streypers, Lückens, van Bebbler, Jansen, Schumacher, Kassel, Keyser, Rittinghuysen, Kunders, Tyson, Siemes. Keurlis, Bleikers, Tunes, van Sintern, Neus, Engel, Schlegel, etc.*

Mennonite immigrants to Germantown were not numerous. In all there were perhaps not more than fifty families. Later many more located farther north and west

along the Skippack and Pequea. After 1700, however, Germantown became the nucleus of a large settlement of non-Mennonites. Especially attractive was the colony for numerous German religious groups and denominations. In Germantown were organized not only the first Mennonite, and the first and perhaps only German Quaker congregation in America, but also the first Dunkard, the first German Reformed, German Lutheran, German Moravian, to say nothing of a number of other groups.

Soon after 1702 the available land about Germantown had largely been taken up, which necessitated the establishing of a second Mennonite colony along Skippack Creek, a tributary of the Perkiomen, about thirty miles above Germantown. This new settlement, begun by a Germantown colonist and several of his fellow immigrants a little later, became the center of a flourishing colony of Palatine Mennonites.

In Germantown, the few Mennonites at first met with the Quakers in common worship, but as new immigrants came and as they represented different denominations, the religious groups began to separate for worship. By 1690, the Mennonites, although they were still without a minister, met in a private house for religious instruction consisting of reading by one of their number from a book of sermons. William Rittenhouse, who arrived in 1688, was soon after, in 1690, elected as their first minister. In 1708 the first log meetinghouse was erected on the site occupied by the present structure on Germantown Avenue. The Mennonite group among the colonists did not grow rapidly, Germantown being passed by for the newer colonies farther west. By 1712 there was a membership in the two congregations of Germantown and Skippack of ninety-nine, embracing in all, perhaps, a Mennonite population of about two hundred.

## The First Petition Against Slavery

These Germantown Mennonites and Mennonite-Quakers not only formed the advance guard of the German immigration to America, but they were pioneers in other important respects also. In 1688 they issued the first public protest against slavery on record in America, although the institution had also been forbidden in the Plockhoy colony in 1663. To the German Mennonites the holding of slaves ran counter to both their racial ideals and their religious convictions. The English Quakers still held slaves. It was for the purpose of showing their disapproval of the practise as well as for the purpose of fostering German immigration that a group of four men in the year mentioned—Pastorius, Lutheran Pietist; Gerrit Hendricks, Mennonite; Derick op den Graeff, Mennonite-Quaker; and Abraham his brother, first Mennonite, but later Quaker and finally free-lance; sent a memorial to the Quaker Monthly Meeting protesting against the holding of slaves.

"Those who hold slaves are no better than Turks," the protest declares, "for we have heard that ye most part of such Negers are brought hither against their will and consent, and that many of them are stolen." The institution was also cited in Germany evidently as an argument against further emigration. "For", the protest continues, "this makes an ill report in all those countries of Europe where they hear off, that ye Quackers do here handel men, like they handel there ye cattle and for that reason have no mind or inclination to come hither."

The English Quakers were not ready yet, however, to champion the cause of absolute freedom. The Monthly Meeting, deciding the matter too weighty for their consideration referred it to the Quarterly Meeting, which in turn avoided the subject by passing it on to the Annual Meeting where no further action was taken on the matter.

## An Early Political Experiment

The Germantown colony also furnishes us an interesting example of an early Mennonite political experiment. In 1691 the village was incorporated under the laws of the province, the first to receive a special charter. The form of government provided for in this first Pennsylvania borough was that of a closed corporation, the corporate members being granted the exclusive right of the franchise, of legislation, and of admitting new members into the corporation. The first corporate members were mostly Mennonites and Mennonite-Quakers, who maintained control of the village government long after they were outnumbered by residents who did not share their religious views, nor their scruples against the use of force in maintaining order. So long as village ordinances and local litigation concerned themselves only with stray pigs and line fences there was little difficulty in securing Mennonite officials, but with the building of a jail and the introduction of stocks and the whipping post, they lost their desire for office. As early as 1701 Pastorius complained to Penn that he found it increasingly difficult to find men who would serve in the general court for "conscience sake," and hoped for relief from the arrival of new immigrants. Several men declined to accept offices to which they had been elected. Finally in 1707, the village lost its charter, and it was merged for political purposes with the township of which it was a part. The Mennonites refused to hold office; but, together with the Mennonite-Quakers who had not yet lost their former Mennonite prejudice against office holding, they at the same time retained control of the franchise. For this reason we have here the unparalleled instance of a corporation losing its charter because no one could be found who was willing to hold the offices.



## Later History

The remaining history of the Germantown church can be dismissed with a few words. Later immigrants as we saw passed it by for more favorable lands elsewhere. In 1770 the old log building was replaced by the little stone structure, still standing. At that time the congregation numbered only twenty-five. It finally became extinct, but was again revived in 1863, under the pastorate of F. R. S. Hunsicker. At present it has a membership of thirty-four, and is affiliated with the General Conference branch of the church. Insignificant as its later history may have been, however, yet the Germantown settlement exerted no mean influence upon the church at large, and indirectly upon the civil and religious history of Philadelphia and the state of Pennsylvania. In the house of van Bebber was held, in 1690, the first service of the German Lutheran church in America, and according to the late N. B. Grubb at least ten of the present churches of Philadelphia including one Evangelical, two Episcopal, one Presbyterian, were all first organized in the little Mennonite meetinghouse. Many of these also drew heavily upon the Mennonites for their membership.

## Prominent Names

In the list of names prominent in the industrial and political life of Pennsylvania can be found many of the descendants of the first Mennonite settlers. In 1690 William Rittenhouse built on the Wissahickon, now a part of Fairmount Park, the first paper mill in America. His great-grandson, David Rittenhouse, born in 1732, became a celebrated astronomer of his day, and an intimate friend of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. A prominent member of the Assembly during the Revolutionary

War, he was appointed first director of the United States Mint by Washington. Among other prominent descendants of these first Mennonites, to mention only a few, was the late Governor Samuel Pennypacker, who in addition to his political activities did much to create an interest not only in Mennonite history but also in that of all Pennsylvania Germans; and all the other prominent Pennypackers of the country; Samuel Cunard, founder of the well-known Cunard steamship line; and William C. Gorgas, who by discovering the yellow fever mosquito eliminated one of the most dreaded scourges of the land, and made the building of the Panama Canal possible. Surgeon General William Crawford Gorgas was the direct descendant of both John Gorgas, a charter member of the Germantown Mennonite church, as well as of William Rittenhouse, the first Mennonite minister in the Germantown congregation and in America.

### SWISS-GERMAN PALATINES

These early Germantown Mennonites, coming largely from northwestern Germany, and for the most part of Dutch stock, constituted but the advance guard of the steady stream of Mennonite immigration which found its way into Pennsylvania throughout the first half of the century. After 1700 few came from this part of Germany. A much larger migration was that of the Swiss-Germans from the Palatinate. Although we are primarily concerned here with the Mennonites, it must be remembered that during this period tens of thousands of Palatines of every faith known in Germany—Lutherans, Reformed, Catholics, Dunkards, Schwenkfelders, Moravians, and mystics, as well as Mennonites settled in southeastern Pennsylvania to form the basis of that picturesque element of the Quaker State population commonly known as the Pennsylvania Dutch.

The cause of this immigrant tide was mainly economic pressure, although in the case of some, religious oppression was a contributing factor. During the early eighteenth century there was great poverty and distress throughout the Palatinate. During the war of the Palatinate (1688-1697) the French armies completely devastated the country. Soon after, severe winters and famine added to the distress. Just at this time, too, came an urgent invitation, widely published, from Queen Anne of England to settle in the American colonies. The climax of distress seems to have been reached in the year 1709, for in that year a sudden emigration fever seems to have seized the Palatines. Some eight or ten thousand during the year poured into England, hoping to be transported to America. The English Government, surprised at this sudden inundation of Germans, was hardly prepared to care for them. Most of them were induced to return to Germany; some were settled in Ireland. About six hundred were transported to the Carolinas where Graffenried had already established a Swiss colony in New Bern. The next year a number were sent to New York. Only a few families found their way in this year to Pennsylvania. The next year, however, and the years following the latter state became the chief objective of the movement. The Mennonites who formed only a small part of this tide had added reason for leaving the Palatinate. While the larger portion of the settlers were Germans, the Mennonites were Swiss exiles who had been forced to find temporary homes in the Palatinate in 1671 and the years following. These were still living under annoying and oppressive religious restrictions.

### **Along the Skippack**

The first Mennonite Palatine immigrants joined some Germantown colonists in founding the Skippack settle-

ment on a tract of land bought by Matthias van Bebber in the year 1702, in what is now Perkiomen township, in Montgomery county. Before 1709, however, there were only a few scattered families. According to William Penn, in that year six Palatine Mennonite families left London for Pennsylvania, but where they settled is uncertain, undoubtedly along the Skippack, however. This initial colony expanded during the next fifty years by natural increase and by additions from Germany until it formed a Mennonite community on both sides of Skippack Creek ten miles wide extending north through the north central part of Montgomery county, the western part of Bucks county, a small section of eastern Berks and Lehigh counties, southern Northampton, and included also a few scattered settlements in Chester county. By the time of the Revolutionary War, among perhaps others, the following congregations were already well established in this area—Skippack, Deep Run, Franconia, Salford, Swamp, Plain, Methacton, Schuylkill, Hereford, Springfield, Rockhill, Blooming Glen, Coventry, Upper Milford, Saucon, Siegfried, etc.

Among the prevailing Mennonite family names in their modern spelling are the following: *Funk, Stauffer, Gottschall, Ziegler, Clemmer or Clymer, Roth, Bechtel, Boyer, Moyer, Bergey, Detweiler, Huffman, Gehman, Bauman, Kolb, Pennypacker, Frey, Showalter, Kratz, Oberholtzer, Longenecker, Yoder, Hunsicker, Alderfer, Wambold, Haldeman, Fretz, High, Geisinger, Geil, Benner, Hiestand, Souder, Allebach, Beidler, etc.*

An early Mennonite Palatine settlement was made in the Watauga Valley in North Carolina which was still in existence in 1773, but of which little is known since. This was likely a daughter colony of the Pennsylvania and Virginia settlements.

## The Pequea Colony

By far the largest and most important of the early Palatine colonies, however, was the one established by the Swiss Palatine Mennonites along the Pequea Creek, a tributary of the Susquehanna in what is now Lancaster county. These pioneers who founded the first white settlement in the region of the fertile Susquehanna were mostly of such Swiss as had been driven into the Palatinate in 1671 and the years following. The Swiss exiles of 1709 and 1710 were not among the earliest comers, although later many of these found their way into Pennsylvania also.

This pioneer group consisted of ten men, "Switzers, lately arrived in the Province" to whom Penn gave in 1710 a warrant for ten thousand acres of land situated "on the northwesterly side of a hill twenty miles easterly from Conestoga near the head of the 'Perquin Creek.' " The consideration for the entire tract was five hundred pounds sterling money, and one shilling quitrent annually for every hundred acres. The region was "a rich limestone country, beautifully adorned with sugar maple, hickory, and black and white walnut on the border of a delightful stream abounding in the finest trout."

The first settlers were evidently well pleased with their surroundings, for early the next spring (1711) they sent one of their number, Martin Kendig, back to the Palatinate to urge their poverty-stricken and oppressed friends and relatives to join them in their new home. Kendig returned the same year with a number of new families, and during the next fifty years hundreds of Mennonite families from the Palatinate—Swiss and South Germans—were added to the original Pequea colony. For during all these years the Palatines remained poor in Germany and suffered certain religious restrictions



in their native land.\* Their distress, in the Palatinate, was continually aggravated, too, by the continued arrival of fresh exiles from Switzerland. These conditions, together with the invitation of the king of England, himself a German, to settle in Pennsylvania, as well as the repeated invitation of relatives already here were responsible for the steady stream of immigrants who came to Pennsylvania during the next half century.

### **Dutch Mennonites Lend a Helping Hand**

Although a few of the pioneers were men of means, most of them were too poor to pay their passage money across. The Dutch Mennonites of Amsterdam organized the "Commission for Foreign Needs" to help their needy Swiss and Palatine brethren. By 1732 over three thousand had asked for assistance, perhaps not all Mennonites, many of whom were given aid. Among the Germans, themselves, two elders, Benedikt Brechtbühl and Hans Burghalter, were untiring in their efforts to relieve distress, and in enlisting aid through many letters to the Dutch Mennonites in behalf of those of their numbers who needed help. Both of these names are common today in Lancaster county. Burghalter was for many years a minister in the Geroldsheim church in the Palatinate, where he died at a ripe old age in 1752.

### **Heavy Immigration of 1717 and 1727**

The year 1717, was one of exceptionally heavy immigration, for many besides Mennonites were now coming to southeastern Pennsylvania, although the pioneer Pequea colony remained largely Mennonite. This settlement expanded until ultimately the Mennonites occu-

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\* For a detailed description of the oppression still suffered by the Mennonites of this period, see the chapter on South Germany; also Smith, *The Mennonite Immigration into Pennsylvania in the Eighteenth Century*, chapter II.

pied nearly all of present rural Lancaster county, with some scattered settlements along the edges of the neighboring counties. By 1727 so many Germans had come to Pennsylvania that the English provincial authorities became alarmed lest the Germans completely dominate the political and social life of the province. To discourage further immigration a law was passed in the above year levying a head tax upon every immigrant, and compelling every ship captain to submit a complete list of all new arrivals after that date.

### **Mennonite Arrivals Not Numerous**

As to the exact number of Mennonites who came to Pennsylvania during the eighteenth century most estimates are too large. The estimate of one hundred thousand Germans, all told, may not be much out of the way, but of these the Mennonites formed a very small part. The entire number, including children, was certainly not over twenty-five hundred.

By the time of the Revolutionary War, which marked the end of this period of German and Mennonite immigration, the following family names were common in Lancaster county—*Kendig, Miller, Graff, Herr, Overholt, Bowman, Schantz, Weber, Brenneman, Hershey, Brubaker, Baer, Lehman, Witmer, Funk, Shenk, Landes, Huber, Kaufman, Kreider, Boehm, Eby, Brackbill, Burkholder, Stemen, Frick, Erisman, Newcomer, Neff, Boyer, Erb, Reist, Hess, Bookwalter, Nissly, Snavelly, Good, Beyer, Musselman, Meylin, Martin, Root, Ebersole, Wenger, Eschleman, Shellenberger, Mellinger, Bamberger, Risser, Schertz*, etc.

### **Indian Raids**

The Pequea settlement was in the heart of the Indian country. For a time Mennonites and Indians lived on

friendly terms, and their children often played together. But as the settlement grew, the Indians moved farther west, and during the later colonial wars the entire frontier from Pennsylvania through to the Virginia settlements often suffered from Indian raids. In 1758 a letter written by several Mennonite ministers to Holland asking for financial help states that two hundred families in Pennsylvania had been robbed of their property by the Indians and fifty persons had been killed. Among these were some Mennonites and Amish.

### **Naturalization of Germans**

According to the laws of Pennsylvania only the English and naturalized non-English could bequeath and inherit property. Since naturalization could be secured only by a special act of assembly upon petition, German Mennonites frequently found it difficult to become full-fledged citizens. The Germantown Mennonites were naturalized in a body in 1709. No Lancastrians were naturalized until 1729, and then only after years of petitioning. This act did not apply to the Amish, who had to petition separately in 1742. After the latter year, a general act was passed covering all aliens, and special petitions were no longer necessary.

### **Redemptioners**

As just noted, the Palatine Mennonites were, with a few exceptions, mostly of the poorer classes and many did not have sufficient means to pay their passage across the Atlantic. Such as did not receive sufficient help from the Dutch relief committee were forced to seek means elsewhere. It was the practice in those days for poor emigrants to sell their services for a number of years to the ship captain in return for free passage. Such labor the captain could then dispose of as he saw fit.

Usually it was sold at public auction to the highest bidder when the ship arrived at Philadelphia. The term of service for an adult was usually four or five years, while a minor served until twenty-one years of age. Persons thus serving for their passage were called "redemptioners." Many of the Pennsylvania immigrants, including not a few Mennonites, were of this class.

### Hardships of the Atlantic Voyage

The passage across the Atlantic was long and frequently hazardous. In fair weather and under normal conditions ten or twelve weeks was sufficient for the voyage, and suffering was not great, but in case of contrary winds and storms, ships would often be driven far out of their course. The death rate, especially in cases of small children, was often high. In 1732 the ship, *John and William*, left Rotterdam with two hundred and twenty passengers, including a number of Mennonites. The ship was seventeen weeks on the way and forty-four passengers died enroute. In the same year, another ship from Rotterdam bound for Philadelphia landed at Martha's Vineyard Island after a voyage covering twenty-four weeks. Provisions became short. The passengers had no bread for eight weeks. So great was their hunger that they scoured the ship for vermin. A rat was rated at eighteen pence by the hungry cast-aways, and a mouse at six pence. Seven died in one night. Of the one hundred and fifty passengers that left Rotterdam only fifty survived, one hundred having perished on the way. The next year, the ship *Experiment* left with one hundred and eighty passengers and arrived at New York with only eighty on board.

These were exceptional cases, of course, but even at best a voyage across the ocean in those days was a matter requiring great courage. Added to these hazards

beyond human control were others due to the greed of ship owners. Often greedy captains would overcrowd their ships, furnish poor food and by failing to provide proper sanitation greatly increased the death toll. Gottlieb Mittelberger, who arrived in 1750, wrote a book describing the situation on the immigrant ships in the hope of alleviating the worst conditions. Thirty-two died on the ship on which he was a passenger. Among the breeders of disease on shipboard he mentioned "foul water full of worms, salted food, biscuits full of worms and spiders, damp, heat, hunger, lice so thick that they had to be scraped off." Warm food was furnished only three times each week, he said, and children under seven usually died from hunger, thirst and itch. The Pennsylvania Assembly finally passed laws specifying the number of passengers that could be placed on board ship, and regulating the quality of food and sanitary conditions in general. For a long time, too, strict quarantines were maintained to prevent sick passengers from spreading contagious diseases in the province contracted on board ship due to unsanitary conditions.

### **Mennonites Mostly Farmers**

The Pequea and Skippack Mennonites were of the small farmer class in their Swiss and Palatine homes, and here too, they became tillers of the soil exclusively, avoiding the towns and cities as they developed later. It was the relatively few Scotch-Irish and English who organized and named the townships, cities and other civil units. Although the Mennonites founded the first settlement in Lancaster county and later absorbed nearly the entire county, there are few names on the map outside of a number of cross roads post-offices which would indicate a Germanic origin. Lancaster city was founded by the English settlers and developed into one of the



most influential towns of the day. It was seriously considered by the first Congress as the permanent Federal capital. A book on geography in 1816 calls it the largest inland city in America. Although the city is full of the descendants of the pioneer settlers, it was only within recent years that members of the church organized a congregation there. There is today within the county a Mennonite population, including all the families, of about twenty-five thousand.

There was little organized ecclesiastical life among the Mennonites. Each congregation was a unit to itself. Occasionally matters of common concern, however, required united action. In 1727, a conference of all the Pennsylvania congregations was held, just where is not known, to consider among other matters an English translation of their confession of faith. The following ministers and congregations were represented at that meeting:

Skippack—Jacob Gottschalk, (Gaetschalek), Henry Kolb, Claes Jansen, Michael Ziegler.

Germantown—Johannes Gorgas, Jan Cunrad, Klaas Rittinghuysen.

Conestoga—Hans Burghalter, Christian Herr, Benedict Hirschi, Martin Baer, Johannes Bowman.

Great Swamp—Velte Clemer.

Manatant—Daniel Longenecker, Jacob Begthley.

Frequent, but irregular conferences were held later. By 1844 Christian Herr, a local historian writes: "The Mennonite congregations in Pennsylvania are divided into three general circuits within each of which semi-annual conferences consisting of bishops, elders or ministers and deacons are held for the purpose of consulting each other and devising means to advance the spiritual prosperity of the members."

Among the Palatines were a number of peace groups having much in common with the Mennonites. Among these were the Dunkards, who had their origin in Germany in 1708 and moved bodily to Germantown in 1719. They followed the Mennonites to their Skippack and Pequea settlements where their proselyting zeal gained a number of adherents to their faith. Conrad Beissel, one of their number, withdrew from them in 1728 and founded at Ephrata the Seventh Day Baptist monastic community. The old community house where the brethren lived, monk fashion, in their cells is still standing, a venerable old reminder of the good old days long past. Several of the early Mennonite pioneers were drawn into this movement. The attempt of Count Zinzendorf to unite all the Pennsylvania Palatines into one church did not seriously affect the Mennonites. Some Mennonites, however, were won to the Methodist revival which struck Pennsylvania during the latter quarter of the century. Among them was Martin Boehm, Mennonite bishop at Willow Street, who as noted elsewhere together with Otterbein, a Reformed minister, founded the United Brethren church, but who later also became one of the pioneer Methodist preachers in Pennsylvania.

About the same time, too, Jacob Engel, once a Mennonite, became one of the founders of the River Brethren.

The Mennonites were not a proselyting people, nor were they active in the spreading of their propaganda. Consequently, although they lost large numbers of their members to other churches, they scarcely ever gained any in return.

One of the chief reasons for the loss of membership, chiefly among the younger people, was the ultraconservatism of the great mass of the Pennsylvania churches. Large, compact communities maintained a much stronger spirit of conservatism than did the smaller, more open

daughter colonies established in the states farther west. Lancaster county with some hundred congregations of Old Mennonites and several other groups of conservative branches totaling a population of perhaps some twenty-five thousand souls, is still reluctant to affiliate upon terms of equality even with other congregations of its own branch of the denomination in the western states. Had the Pennsylvania Mennonites been as able to hold their young people in the church as have their Russian brethren, they, together with their daughter settlements, ought to have a membership of at least several hundred thousand today.

### EARLY AMISH COLONIES

Just when the first Amish came to America is not known to a certainty. Likely a few stragglers may have been included among the early Mennonite immigrants. It was not until about 1736, however, that the Amish came in sufficient numbers to establish their own settlements and form a congregation. During the twenty-year period between 1735 and 1755 among the Amish immigrants, also Swiss Palatines, who claim a long line of descendants today all through the country may be mentioned Jacob Hochstetler; Jacob Beiler; Jacob Hartzler; the Jotters (Yoder), Christian and Jacob; the Zug brothers, Christian, Moritz and Johannes; Christian Hershberger, Christian Stutsman, and the bearers of such names as *Blauch*, *Fisher*, *Troyer*, *Detweiler*, *Miller*, *Mast*, *Kaufman*, *Koenig*, *Lantz*, *Schrag*, *Umble*, *Stolzfus*, *Peachey*, *Gnaegi*, *Hoelly*, *Lap*, etc. This list includes almost all of the common names of the Pennsylvania Amish and their descendants today. Few names were added to this list after the French and Indian War—among others Jacob Borntreger in 1767, and Jacob Coblentz in 1770.

## **The Northkill Settlement**

The first settlement and congregation was formed in 1736, some distance to the north of the Pequea Mennonite settlement, near a gap in the Blue Mountains, in what is now northern Berks county, a region then spoken of as Northkill. Why these Amish established their colony so far out on the Indian frontier is not known, undoubtedly, however, because of the cheap lands, and perhaps partly because they did not wish to be too near their Mennonite brethren. By 1742 the settlement was large enough to petition the general assembly for the rights of naturalization, without which they could not purchase land. Several other small colonies were located a little farther south in the same county soon after. But the entire number of Amish immigrants to Pennsylvania was not large during the eighteenth century, perhaps all told not over five hundred souls.

## **Indian Raids**

The Northkill location was not a happy one; it was too near the Indian frontier for safety. In the course of the French and Indian War, during a series of Indian raids in 1757, in which several hundred settlers all along the frontier line were massacred, many of the Amish families were driven from their new homes. Jacob Hochstettler's home was attacked and his wife and two children were murdered, and another was carried away by the Indians. A few of the Amish came back after the war. Most of them sought safety nearer the older settlements in Lancaster and western Chester counties. The pioneer Northkill congregation eventually disappeared entirely.

## **Religious Practises**

The Amish brought with them from their Palatine

home all the conservatism and suspicion of their Mennonite brethren which characterized their religious life in Germany. A report sent to Europe in 1773 by several Mennonite ministers in the Skippack colony in describing the different Mennonite settlements in Pennsylvania states:

"As to the Amish, they are many in number but they are not here near us and we can give no further information except only this, that they hold very fast to the outward and ancient institutions."

Among the "outward and ancient" institutions which differentiated them from the Mennonites at that time was the *Meidung* and foot washing, the latter of which the Pequea Mennonites also later adopted, though it was perhaps not practised among them at the time of their immigration. The Amish were more conservative than the Mennonites in their dress regulations as well as in their social and religious practises in general. They retained their long hair, beards, obsolete styles of clothing, hooks and eyes, and broad-brimmed hats. The women even more, always appeared in out-moded styles of dress. They scrupulously avoided following the changing social customs of the period. They met in private homes for worship, as had been their custom in Europe. In their church government they were congregational, though frequently the elders met to agree upon common rules for the guidance of their members in their social and religious practises.

These regulations were never printed, but were kept in manuscript carefully preserved by the church leaders and often copied from generation to generation, many of them still in force among the Old Order today. The Strassburg rules of 1568, drawn up before the Amman controversy of 1693, of course, seemingly were popular among the Amish of both Europe and America. As new



conditions arose, new regulations became necessary. Although we have no record of any such new rules during the eighteenth century, yet in 1809 the Pennsylvania elders in a meeting found it necessary to insist that the *Meidung* applied to eating and drinking as well as to all social and business intercourse, and must be so observed by the members. Shaving, trimming the beard, jury service, these also were under the ban; while high collared coats, high trousers, high hats, combs in the hair, and such other like worldly customs were to be *gar-nicht geduldet*.

Somewhat later, in 1857, in a meeting of the ministers of Somerset and surrounding counties, a daughter colony of the original eastern Pennsylvania settlement, mothers were especially warned against dressing their children extravagantly, such worldly vanities as silk neckscarfs tied in a fancy bow, high collars on the boys' shirts, men's hats for the daughters; it was decreed that such "shall not be" Fancy house decorations, too, were discouraged, bright colored paints, fancy glass dishes on the shelves, and mirrors on the walls. Jury service and voting was again tabooed. Parents were warned especially against permitting their children to indulge too freely and recklessly in the pleasures of sleighing parties. Two-colored painted sleighs and vehicles were not allowed. Parents would be held personally responsible for permitting among the young folks the practise of bundling.\*

From this early pioneer settlement in Berks county a large Amish colony has since developed, covering the northeastern corner of what is now Lancaster county,

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\* The custom of courting under bed covers in many parts of New England and Pennsylvania in the Colonial days when stoves were scarce and living space in the small houses limited.

the northwestern nook of Chester county, and the southern tip of Berks, of about seven thousand souls, many still of the *Old Order* with dress and customs and practises not far removed from those of their pioneer ancestors. The daughter colonies farther west, of course, are not here included in these statistics.

## X

### EXPANSION OF THE PIONEER SETTLEMENTS (1683-1800)

Before the middle of the eighteenth century the best lands of southeastern Pennsylvania had been occupied by the German and Scotch Irish immigrants. Consequently the children of the pioneers as well as later immigrants were forced to push the frontier line of settlements up the river valleys into the interior of Pennsylvania and Virginia. In the very front of this advancing tide were usually found a number of Mennonites, who settled in small colonies far out on the frontier where land was cheap, and where room for expansion was ample.

#### MARYLAND

Before the French and Indian War, Lancaster county Mennonites, following the advancing tide of settlements, planted colonies across the Susquehanna in York county, and then through the Cumberland Valley in Cumberland and Franklin counties, Pennsylvania, and Washington county, Maryland. Although a few stray Mennonites may have remained in the Cumberland Valley in the early rush into the Shenandoah, yet it was not until well toward the close of the century that the settlements were sufficiently large to form separate church congregations. On the Maryland side of the valley, however, they were sufficiently numerous in 1776 to demand some recognition upon their refusal to bear arms during the Revolutionary War from the state convention, which was then drafting a new constitution.

## THE SHENANDOAH

As just indicated, the Cumberland Valley at first served as a convenient passage-way through which the Pennsylvania Mennonites and the other Germans entered the beautiful Shenandoah. Here at Massanutting along the South Fork of the Shenandoah near what is now Luray, in Page county, in 1729, in the very first German settlement in the valley, were found a few Lancaster county Mennonites. In a few years the Mennonites formed the largest contingent of the Germans in that pioneer settlement, although there were perhaps never more than several dozen families in that place. These settlements in Page county were never prosperous, and have long since become extinct. During the French and Indian War the Indians made raids into the valley, and carried off many of the settlers. In one of these raids, in 1766, John Rhodes, a Mennonite minister, his wife, three sons and two daughters were killed by the Indians, and a surviving son was carried away, who after three years of captivity returned to his friends. Many families were compelled to return to Pennsylvania during these times. This colony, too, was located in what was called the Northern Neck, a region to which Lord Fairfax for many years tried to establish a private claim. During this controversy many of the settlers, including the Mennonites, feeling themselves insecure in their land titles, moved farther up into the valley in what are now Rockingham and Augusta counties. By about 1800, the Mennonites had occupied the greater part of the Linville Valley, which embraced the region extending from Linville Creek on the east to the North Mountain on the west, and the Shenandoah on the north, to Linville and Singers Glen on the south, a district about ten miles long by eight miles wide. After 1780, however, when Harrisonburg

was founded as the county seat of the newly organized Rockingham county, many of the Linville settlers located west of the new town, where a large Mennonite community has since developed.

The Virginia Mennonites were the only members of their faith within the late slaveholding Confederacy. To their credit be it said that, true to their religious principles, they never held slaves. Their attitude toward slavery is perhaps well illustrated in the following incident told by the Quaker, John Woolman, in his well-known *Journal*, in the course of one of his numerous journeys through Virginia in 1758. Says Woolman:

At Monalen a Friend gave me some account of a religious Society among the Dutch called Mennonists, and among other things related a passage in substance as follows: One of the Mennonists having an acquaintance with a man of another society at a considerable distance, and being with his wagon on business near the house of his said acquaintance, and night coming on, he had thoughts of putting up with him, but passing by his friend's fields, and observing the distressed appearance of his slaves, he kindled a fire in the woods hard by, and lay there for the night. His said acquaintance hearing where he lodged, and afterward meeting the Mennonist, told him of it, adding he should have been heartily welcomed at his house, and from their acquaintance in former time wondered at his conduct in that case. The Mennonist replied, Ever since I lodged by thy field I have wanted an opportunity to speak with thee. I had intended to come to thy house for entertainment, but seeing thy slaves at their work, and observing the manner of their dress, I had no liking to come to partake with thee. He then admonished him to use them with more humanity, and added, As I lay by the fire that night, I thought that as I was a man of substance thou wouldst have received me freely; but if I had been as poor as one of thy slaves and had no power to help myself, I should have received from thy hand no kinder usage than they.

As late as 1864, at a time when it took great courage in the South to oppose the institution, the Mennonites



went on record in a conference resolution to the following effect:

Decided that inasmuch as it is against our creed and discipline to own or traffic in slaves, so it is also forbidden a brother to hire a slave unless such slave be entitled to receive the pay for such labor by the consent of the owner. But where neighbors exchange labor, the labor of slaves may be received.

During the first half of the past century, the Virginia Mennonites developed considerable interest in literary and musical activities. Among the early Virginia families were the Funks. One of these, Joseph Funk, especially, was active in this direction. He was a school teacher, and also a publisher of Mennonite books and tracts, as well as of sacred melodies, and music books, on the first Mennonite printing press in America. In 1832 he compiled a book of sacred melodies called *Harmonia Sacra*, which had a wide circulation not only through Virginia, but throughout the Mennonite church at large. It went through seventeen editions, the last one appearing in the latter seventies of the past century. To the passing generation of Mennonites in the Shenandoah today the *Harmonia Sacra* is what the McGuffey readers are to the old timers in Ohio. Singers Glen, the original home of the publishing house, was known far and wide through the valley in its day as a center of sacred music. In 1837 Funk also translated and published the so-called "Long" Confession of Faith of thirty-three articles found in the Martyrs' Mirror, together with *Nine Reflections* by Bishop Peter Burkholder.

## WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA

### Along the Juniata

In the meantime the tide of settlement had ascended the Susquehanna and Juniata. In 1772 John Graybill

from Lancaster county began a colony on the Mahantago in Snyder county, near what is now Richfield. A little later several other small Mennonite communities were established near by, and in neighboring counties, but these never became large, and most of them finally disappeared. The largest settlement in this general region was formed by Lancaster and Berks county Amish, near the close of the century in the picturesque valley of the Kishacoquillas, in what is now Mifflin county. This picturesque valley is now almost completely occupied by an equally picturesque colony of Amish comprising nearly three thousand souls, mostly of the Old Order, but including also about all the varieties of Amish known.

### **On the Headwaters of the Ohio**

About the same time, too, in 1767, Christian Blauch founded an Amish settlement near the headwaters of the Ohio River. This early settlement, made even before the Indians had been officially removed from the land, has grown since into a number of large Amish and several Mennonite congregations covering Westmorland, Fayette and Somerset counties. Among other early Amishmen to locate in this region was Joseph Schantz, founder in 1800 of Johnstown, famous for its flood in the eighties of the past century.

## **ONTARIO**

The largest and most important of the daughter colonies of this period was the one located across the Great Lakes, in Ontario at the very end of the century. By this time land prices in the thickly settled regions of southeastern Pennsylvania had risen extraordinarily high. But it was not population pressure alone that induced the surplus population of the older Mennonite congrega-

tions to seek a new home under a foreign though familiar flag. The Canadian Mennonites of today would have us believe that their forefathers were merely continuing their traditional Mennonite quest for religious toleration. But the case is not so simple as that. The motives back of the Canadian trek were mixed.

It is well known, of course, that the Pennsylvania Mennonites, because of their non-resistant doctrines were opposed to political revolutions of any sort, including the revolution of 1776; and consequently they were frequently accused by the revolutionary party as lukewarm toward the American cause and sometimes even as sympathetic toward the loyalists. In a few cases they were imprisoned, their property confiscated, and their lives threatened by superpatriotic mobs. The period of anarchy immediately following the war did not add to their feeling of security under the Confederation Congress. But the Mennonite movement to Canada continued long after a stable constitutional government had been established in the United States, and the young state of Pennsylvania had guaranteed both the Mennonites and the Quakers full religious toleration including military exemption in its fundamental law.

The Canadian Government on the other hand, then still under direct English control, offered liberal inducements, and free lands to the loyalists of the States during this early period before the adoption of our Constitution; and thousands of American loyalists took advantage of these liberal terms, settling a large part of what is now Upper Ontario. This region was still the Canadian West at that time, with wide stretches of unoccupied lands awaiting industrious settlers. Being especially desirous of settlers of good reputation, the Canadian authorities offered exceptional inducements including military exemption to Quakers and allied groups.

And so, while a few of the earlier Mennonite settlers before 1800 may have followed the loyalists to Canada because of their preference for the familiar Union Jack to the recently adopted Stars and Stripes, that could not have been the chief inducement to the numerous immigrants who continued the trek to the valley of the Grand long after the United States Constitution had insured a secure and prosperous life on this side of the Great Lakes. The Mennonites from the crowded settlements of Pennsylvania went to Canada largely, among perhaps lesser reasons, because land was cheap and fertile; and because before the day of railroads and hard roads it was easier to follow the river valleys to the north and west into Canada than to cross the mountains over rough wagon trails into western Pennsylvania and Ohio.

### **The Twenty**

By the turn of the century three separate Mennonite settlements had been established across the Niagara in Ontario. The first of these was founded in 1786 near the mouth of Twenty Mile Creek where it empties into the south shore of Lake Ontario about twenty miles west of the Niagara, by five families from Bucks county, Pennsylvania—the Kulps, John, Dilman, and Stoffel; and Franklin Albright, and Frederick Hahn. Others followed in the years immediately succeeding until a substantial settlement was made, followed by a church congregation in 1801, with a total number of perhaps about one hundred souls. Soon other congregations were formed in the surrounding country, mostly from Bucks, Lancaster and other Pennsylvania counties. In the course of a short time several small settlements had also been made to the south, on the northern shore of Lake Erie.

## **Waterloo County**

A much larger colony was established about the same time some sixty miles to the northwest, farther out on the frontier, where land was still cheaper in the heavily timbered valley along the Grand River. Two men and their families, Joseph Schoerg and Samuel Betzner of Franklin county, Pennsylvania, were the pioneers in this settlement, locating on the Grand River near what is now Kitchener, but then merely a howling wilderness. This whole region had just recently been vacated by the Indians, and was still unsettled except by a few wandering fur traders. Schoerg and Betzner were the first permanent white settlers, it is said, within what is now Waterloo county. Later, in the same year, several more families from Lancaster county located here, to be followed each year by many others.

## **The Beasley Fraud**

But in 1803 it was accidentally discovered that the farms which had thus far been purchased for several dollars per acre from a land speculator by the name of Richard Beasley, as well as the neighboring tract, were all heavily mortgaged, a fact which speculator Beasley did not mention at the time of the sale. For the time being immigration ceased; and the colony seemingly was about to be broken up, when a group of Lancaster county brethren came to the rescue. Upon the advice of old Hans Eby, a group of Lancaster Mennonites formed a sort of stock company to buy up the entire tract of sixty thousand acres, about two-thirds of entire Waterloo township. The tract was divided into one hundred and thirty-four parcels of four hundred and forty-eight acres each. By paying off the first installment of the purchase price, twenty thousand dollars, the mortgage was released, and the title



cleared. This was still before the days of banking. The whole sum in silver coin was safely carried by wagon, it is said, to Canada, a feat that could not be duplicated in this day of bank robbers.

This effort at cooperation seemingly met with popular approval; for a few years later another stock company along similar lines was formed to purchase a tract of forty-five thousand acres in a neighboring township—Woolwich. This land, too, was paid for with a barrel full of gold and silver, carted without mishap all the way from Pennsylvania.

Immigration to the Waterloo colony was again resumed now, and during the next twenty years numerous families, largely from Lancaster county, but from all the other older settlements of Pennsylvania, as well, were added. A little village soon developed within the settlement, at first called Ebytown, but upon the advice of Benjamin Eby changed in 1827 to Berlin, then during the first World War once more changed to Kitchener.

## Markham

In the meantime the uncertainties caused by the Beasley fraud deflected the immigrant tide for a few years in a new direction. In this same year, 1803, Henry Wideman, a Mennonite preacher from Bucks county, started a new settlement near Markham, some twenty miles north of what was then known as York, but now as Toronto. Several small congregations have since developed in this region.

During the War of 1812 communication between the Canadians and their Pennsylvania brethren was broken up, and there was no immigration for a few years, but it was resumed again soon after. The Mennonites were not forced to serve in the army, but a number were im-

pressed with their teams into the transportation service in the Niagara region during the battles that were fought in that area.

### Common Names

Among the most common names within these three original Canadian settlements are *Bauman, Bechtel, Bergey, Betzner, Brubaker, Burkholder, Cressman, Detweiler, Eby, Erb, Gehman, Gingrich, Groff, Hagey, Horst, Honsberger, Hoffman, Hoch, Hallman, Hoover, Kolb, Martin, Moyer, Musselman, Reist, Reichert, Shenk, Stauffer, Snyder, Shoemaker, Schantz, Wismer, Witmer*, etc.

All told between 1786 and 1825 perhaps about two thousand Mennonites, including children, migrated to Ontario from Pennsylvania.

Beginning with 1824 several hundred Amish immigrants from Europe also located near the Waterloo Mennonites. In recent years also a number of Russian Mennonite immigrants remained in Ontario. Today the total Mennonite population, including all the branches, according to government statistics, counts up approximately to twenty-five thousand.

### Pioneer Hardships

These early pioneers were of hardy stock and endured the usual pioneer hardships. The journey from the Pennsylvania settlements to Waterloo covered about five hundred miles, and was made sometimes on horseback, but most often with the well-known Conestoga wagon, well stocked with household utensils, and bounteous eating supplies, drawn by four or five sturdy horses, and sometimes accompanied with cows that furnished milk along the way. The route usually followed to Waterloo, took the home-seekers up the Susquehanna, across the

Finger Lake region in New York, up the Mohawk to the Niagara, a little below Buffalo, then by way of what is now Hamilton, through the almost impassable "Beverly Swamp" to their new home on the Grand.

Of course, they were all genuine Pennsylvania Dutch, and brought with them to their Canadian homes their Pennsylvania Dutch dialect, Pennsylvania Dutch tastes, social customs, and religious practises.

Like Mennonites everywhere their first task after making the first clearings for their log huts, was to organize a church congregation and establish a school for their children. Among the early spiritual leaders was Benjamin Eby, who came to Waterloo in 1805; and for fifty years was a leading spirit throughout all the settlements. In 1813 the first Waterloo meetinghouse was built on Eby's farm, and was known as the Eby church until well into the beginning of the present century. Here Eby preached and also kept school for many years. He was also interested in a printing establishment which printed many pamphlets and church tracts, throughout the period, including a short history of the Mennonites written by himself in 1841.



# XI

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY WESTWARD EXPANSION

### PENNSYLVANIA AND VIRGINIA EMIGRANTS

#### Ohio

During the first half of the nineteenth century numerous colonies of Mennonites from both the original and daughter settlements beyond the Alleghenies in both Pennsylvania and Virginia were established within the states of the old Northwest Territory. In the very opening of the century, and before Ohio became a state, a small colony had been started within the boundaries of that state. Among a group of colonists from Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, who had founded the present town of Lancaster in Fairfield county, just ten years after Marietta was settled, was a Mennonite named Martin Landis, who a few years later built a meetinghouse on his farm to be at the service of all denominations desiring to use it. Several years later a number of Mennonites came to the same region from Pennsylvania and Virginia. Among these was Henry Stemen, who settled near the present town of Bremen in 1803, and who became one of the pioneer Mennonite bishops of the state.

During the next fifty years a number of communities were organized by easterners in various parts of the state, wherever cheap lands in good farming regions were to be found. Congregations were begun in Stark county



in 1811; in Mahoning and Columbiana counties equally as early if not earlier; and in Wayne and Medina counties in 1825, and 1834, respectively. Before the Civil War, small groups had located throughout northwestern Ohio in Allen, Putnam, Hancock, Wood, Seneca, Williams, Ashland, Clark and Franklin counties. With the exception of several small congregations near Elida, in Allen county, these latter have practically all become extinct. During these years, too, a large number of Europeans, both Mennonites and Amish, located in Ohio, as did also a number of Amish from Pennsylvania. In 1852 also minister Ephraim Hunsberger of the Oberholtzer following from Montgomery county, Pennsylvania, organized a congregation at Wadsworth, in Medina county.

### **New York**

During the same period several small settlements had been made in northwestern New York not far from the Niagara boundary. Natives from Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, had located in Niagara county in 1810, and in Erie county in 1824. In 1831 several German families from the Palatinate found their way here also. These communities never grew large, however, and are now nearly extinct.

### **Indiana**

The first Mennonites in Indiana were the Swiss, who came in 1838. The first native members of the church, however, came from Ohio under the leadership of John Smith from Medina county, who visited Elkhart county, Indiana, in 1843. Two years later he returned with others and began a community in Harrison township in the above county. Other Ohioans followed, and soon several congregations were formed in the county. In 1853 a group of Hollanders from Europe joined the present Salem congregation. Several church divisions occurred

in Indiana during the early seventies, one led by Jacob Wisler, and the other by Daniel Brenneman, but these are discussed elsewhere in this book. Later a number of Wisler and Mennonite Brethren in Christ congregations were established in the region of the early settlement.

## Illinois

Mennonites reached Illinois even earlier than Indiana, coming to that state only a few years later than the Amish. The first Mennonite family to locate in Illinois was that of Benjamin Kendig from Augusta county, Virginia, who left his home in the spring of 1833 in search of better opportunities for himself in the far west. Loading all his worldly possessions on three Conestoga wagons, he began his journey overland through Kentucky, Indiana and Illinois for his western home. In October of the same year, after a journey of eight hundred miles, which was made in seven weeks, he reached what was then known as Holland's Grove in Tazewell county, where he began the first Mennonite community in Illinois near the Amish settlements begun two years before. Others followed from Virginia and Pennsylvania, but the community never grew large and at times was scarcely able to maintain itself as a religious organization. Between 1833 and 1865 a number of small groups of Mennonites from the east located throughout the state, but none of them were large. The entire membership today of all the scattered communities is barely over five hundred. Among the congregations are those at Freeport, founded in the forties; Cullom, in Livingston county, established in 1858; Sterling, founded about the same time; and Morrison, in 1865. Several other congregations were organized which have since become extinct. In 1842 also was begun the German colony in St. Clair county. There is also a small congregation of Pennsylvanian Reformed Mennonites, near Sterling, formed in 1847. The large Amish settle-

ments, throughout central Illinois described elsewhere, do not belong to the group discussed in these paragraphs.

### **Beyond the Mississippi**

Throughout the states beyond the Mississippi, too, after the Civil War small scattered groups of Mennonites from the east were located in Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Idaho, Colorado, Oregon, Oklahoma, North Dakota, Texas and several other states.

These Pennsylvania German Mennonites on their westward trek were followed and accompanied by the Mennonite immigrants coming in large numbers from Russia, Poland, and Prussia in the years 1873-1880.

These pioneers in the far west had to endure all the usual hardships of frontier life. Many were homesteaders, and all were poor. In the early seventies the grasshopper plague, and later hot winds, drove many either back east or to other more favorable western localities. Others remained and have since become fairly prosperous.

### **The Amish also Move West**

The Transallegheny settlements just described in this chapter, as just indicated, were from the Mennonite congregations only. The Amish also followed the lure of the cheap lands of the west during this period, and established many new colonies in all these states.

The pioneer Amish in Ohio were "Yockle" Miller and his two sons and their families from Somerset county Pennsylvania, who located along Sugar Creek in Tuscarawas county in 1808. These were followed soon by many others from the same region. Although the further settlement was temporarily halted for a few years by the

dangers of Indian raids in the War of 1812, and the early-comers had been driven back east, yet soon after the war, additional arrivals flocked to the new colony in large numbers until the settlement spread across the western part of Tuscarawas county, and the eastern end of Holmes, forming what is today one of the largest compact Amish communities in America.

Some years later Pennsylvania Amish communities were formed in Wayne, Fairfield, Logan, and Champaign counties, and still later in Geauga county, in all of which, except in Fairfield, large compact settlements are still found.

By 1840 the westward tide had reached Indiana. A group of landseekers from Somerset county, including preacher Joe Miller, after visiting Iowa and walking back much of the way through Indiana, decided to locate in Elkhart county east of what is now Goshen. From Pennsylvania and some of the older Ohio settlements there were developed within the next twenty-five years numerous congregations in Elkhart, Noble, LaGrange, Marshall, Adams, Newton, Howard, Miami, Allen, Jasper, Davis and Brown counties.

Between 1848 and 1852 several Mifflin county families founded the Rock Creek congregation in McLean county, Illinois. After the Civil War another large community of conservative Pennsylvanians, largely from Somerset county, established the Moultrie and Douglas county congregations.

In Iowa the first colony of native Amish was established in 1846 in Johnson county by a number of Pennsylvanians. In more recent years the lure of cheap lands has called numerous colonies from all these older states to Nebraska, Kansas, Arkansas, Oregon, Colorado, Oklahoma, the Dakotas, Montana and Idaho.

## THE NEW IMMIGRANT TIDE

In the meantime a new immigrant tide of both Mennonites and Amish had set in between 1820 and 1860. The Mennonites came from Switzerland and Bavaria, and Hesse-Darmstadt, while the Amish were largely from France, principally Alsace and Lorraine. To the general causes of this mass immigration movement after the Napoleonic wars—militarism and the fear of it, economic distress, and political unrest, caused by such revolutionary years as 1820, 1830, and 1848 may be added as a further attractive force this side of the Atlantic—the rapid expansion and economic development of the middle west during this period. Directly after the War of 1812, statistics show that the immigration tide from all classes from middle and western Europe rose rapidly, culminating especially in the high record of the year 1820. Enthusiastic letters to friends and relatives in Europe from those already here, and systematic advertising on the part of the ship companies in all the large centers of population greatly aided the immigration movement during those years.

In addition to all these causes which affected all classes more or less, we saw that the Mennonites were especially concerned about the military question. The Mennonites of France, South Germany and Switzerland had all been pressed into service during the Napoleonic wars. At the same time they were trying to maintain their non-resistance. The Ibersheim Conference of 1803 threatened with excommunication all the young men who voluntarily joined the army. The fear lest they might not be able to maintain their peace principles was a strong factor in determining the immigration of so many Mennonites.



## The Swiss

Among the first of the immigrants of the new tide were the Swiss from both the Jura and the Emmental settlements. The pioneer of this Swiss movement was Benedikt Schrag from Basel, who located with his family in what is now Wayne county, Ohio, as early as 1817. As a result of enthusiastic letters written back to his friends, two years later, four families from the Jura congregations—Peter Lehman, Isaac Sommer, Ulrich Lehman and David Kirchhofer—began the large settlement known as the Sonnenberg congregation near Dalton. In the years immediately following many other families joined these early pioneers from both the communities in the Canton of Bern. Two large congregations were formed in Wayne county; and in 1833 Michael Neuenschwander, who had come to Wayne county from Switzerland ten years before, began another colony in what is now Allen county, along the banks of Riley Creek, three miles northwest of what is now Bluffton, but then a howling wilderness. In the years immediately following, numerous Swiss and several Alsatians located in this region, and the community has since developed into four large congregations, embracing an entire Mennonite population of nearly twenty-five hundred.

In the meantime, before 1838, Daniel Baumgartner and several others from Wayne county began another settlement in Adams county, Indiana. In a few years a small group of his fellow-believers had settled in the same region and had formed a church. It was not until the years from 1852 to 1854, however, that large numbers came from Switzerland and laid the foundation of the present large Mennonite community at Berne.

From these pioneer Swiss settlements in Ohio and Indiana other small communities have been established

in recent years in Missouri, Oklahoma, and Oregon with individual settlers in many localities in the west. In recent years, too, several small communities have been founded in the western states by immigrants direct from Switzerland. Among these was a small group of fourteen families who located at Pulaski, Iowa, in 1873, under the leadership of Philip Roulet, who after two years in Butler county, Ohio, had come to Iowa in 1869. This group later moved to Missouri, however, and finally to Kansas. In 1883 another group of ten families came direct from the Canton of Bern to Whitewater, Kansas.

The Swiss immigrants of the earlier period, when they left their homes, packed their goods, wives and children in one-horse wagons and started out on the first five hundred mile lap of their long journey through France to Havre, where they usually sold their horses but not their wagons, and waited for the ship on which they were to take passage. A voyage across the ocean in the small sailing ships of those days was still somewhat of an uncertain and hazardous venture. One group of one hundred and seventy-five persons, in 1852, were given an entire vessel to themselves, a small cotton freighter, a three master, only one hundred and twenty-three feet long, twenty-two feet wide, with a carrying capacity of eight hundred tons. The captain, two steersmen, a cook, mate and nine sailors constituted the crew. In this frail bark they spent six weeks on the seas, a part of the time in heavy storms.

The ships usually landed at New York. Here these sturdy Swiss immigrants would again purchase a horse, which they hitched to the wagon they had brought over with them, and began another overland journey of some five hundred miles over the mountains and across the rivers of Pennsylvania to their chosen homes in the hardwood forests of Ohio, the entire journey from Switz-

erland to Ohio lasting usually in the early days the better part of six months.

The first settlers usually being poor, located on uncleared government land which could still be purchased at \$1.25 per acre. The first years were spent in making small clearings, and erecting the first log buildings. Farm products were cheap. The nearest market was one hundred miles away. Money was scarce. One Swiss in Wayne county, local tradition has it, at one time walked fifteen miles to the home of an Amishman for a postage stamp to send a letter home. Clothing, from straw hats to wooden shoes, was all home grown and home made. For a long time, too, the Swiss retained their strange Swiss customs—hooks and eyes, and *Schwyzter Dytsch* which is still the common language of everyday conversation. Before 1854 baptism was always administered in private, never in public—a custom made necessary in the early days in Switzerland because of persecution.

In their church affiliations they remained for a long time independent from any of the American organized conferences. The Chippewa and a major part of the Sonnenberg congregation, in Wayne county, now affiliate with the Old Mennonites. The remaining communities in Ohio and Indiana joined the General Conference group of churches in the early nineties. In 1878 all the Swiss congregations in Indiana and Ohio met at Sonnenberg for a conference. The bishops present at that time were Ulrich Sommer, Christian Sommer, and Christian B. Steiner from Wayne county; John Moser from Allen county; and Christian Sprunger and Christian B. Lehman from Berne, Indiana.

### The Hessian Group

In the early thirties about one hundred Hessian Mennonites from Hesse-Darmstadt, bearing such names as

*Nafziger, Holly, Kennel, Iutze, Burckey, Jordy, Kistler, Unsicker*, etc., settled in Butler county, Ohio, near the Amish community there. About the same time a small group located among the Amish in Waterloo county, Ontario. A little later several Hessian families moved from here to Putnam county, Illinois, and in the early fifties a congregation was also established in McLean county, Illinois, near the Rock Creek Amish settlement. In all these places, after vain attempts to affiliate with the Amish in worship, the Hessians organized separate congregations.

### **From Bavaria**

Between 1830 and 1855 some fifty families from southern Bavaria arrived in America. Although individuals from various Bavarian congregations were included in the different groups of both Amish and Mennonites who came to America during this period, yet most of them came from three congregations—Weierhof, Eichstock and Maxweiler. Maxweiler left as a body, as did most of Eichstock. The pioneer immigrant of this group, perhaps, was Jacob Krehbiel, from Weierhof, who arrived at Clarence Center, New York, near Buffalo in 1831, where a small congregation soon developed; this congregation later frequently served as a temporary stopping place for Bavarian arrivals whose destination was farther west.

In 1833 a small settlement, started by the Krehbiels and Rissers was located in Ashland county, Ohio, which was served some years later, among a number of earlier ministers, by Carl J. van der Smissen, former principal of the Wadsworth school. The congregation is now extinct.

The chief Bavarian colonies were those in Lee county, Iowa, and Summerfield, Illinois, near St. Louis, both begun in the early forties. Later in the fifties, several

groups from Bavaria augmented both settlements. The Lee county congregation was located near Nauvoo, Illinois, at this time the center of a large colony of Mormons, who were terrorizing the scattered settlements on both sides of the Mississippi. John Miller, the first minister of the Lee county group, was murdered in 1845, by a band of Mormon robbers, which delayed the full organization of a congregation until 1849. Although the Ohio congregation became extinct in course of time, those in Illinois and Iowa have continued to the present day, and in the early sixties, became important charter members of the General Conference movement.

Among the common names of the Bavarian immigrants of the period may be mentioned *Krehbiel*, *Ruth*, *Leisy*, *Haury*, *Risser*, *Hirschler*, *Showalter*, *Schnebele*, *Rupp*, *Pletcher*, *Baer*, *Dester*, *Ellenberger*, *Löwenberg*, *Eyman*, etc.

An interesting account of the means of travel to the west in that day, as well as of its hardships is found in an account written in later years by J. E. Ruth, a member of an immigrant party of seventy-two, which arrived in Lee county in 1852. This party, which was gathered together from various congregations in Bavaria, but principally from Eichstock and Maxweiler, left their Bavarian homes in early June of that year. They sailed from Havre in a sailing vessel, a three master with a tonnage of fifteen hundred. The voyagers still carried their own provisions at this time, and had to prepare their own meals on shipboard. After a stormy passage of fifty-two days, the group landed in New York where they had to wait for five days on a steamer that was to take them up the Hudson to Albany. From here they went by train to Buffalo; and from the latter place by boat to Toledo. Here, one of their number, father Lehman, head of a family of seven, took down with cholera, which was



raging through the country at the time, and in ten hours was dead. The boat stopped long enough to bury the body along the shore.

Reaching Toledo, the party again boarded the train on the first and only railroad then running into Chicago, a little city of some fifteen thousand. This lap of the journey took two days, much of the time being spent on side tracks, waiting for freight trains to pass, freight traffic being considered more important evidently than human cargo. Not having brought sufficient food with them to last through the prolonged journey, the young men of the party were compelled occasionally during the long stops to scour the countryside for provisions. One morning young Wurz and Hertzler\* presented the hungry travellers with a fresh supply of pancakes and buttermilk coaxed out of a generous housewife from a farm home near by.

At Chicago, as everywhere else along the route, Ruth says, they were badly treated as "Green Dutchmen." Following their European practise, no doubt, and perhaps somewhat the demands of necessity, the women of the party took time out during their stay here to do their family washing on the shores of Lake Michigan. From Chicago the journey was continued southward by canal, the only means of travel then available in that direction to the Illinois River, thence down the river to Peoria. The original destination of the group had been Summerfield by way of St. Louis, but hearing that the cholera also was prevalent in that direction, they decided to stop off at Peoria, and from there join the Lee county settlement. Here widow Lehman left the party by special carriage for Fort Madison, Iowa. On the way, her two-year-

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\* Grandfather of Dr. Arthur H. Hertzler, the well-known surgeon of Halstead, Kansas, and author of "The Horse and Buggy Doctor."

old son died. After carrying his dead body in her arms for half a day, she prevailed upon the driver to stop long enough at a lonely farm home along the way to build a coffin and bury the child under a shade tree by the road side. The rest of the group left by stage for Burlington, and soon after arrived in Lee county, three months after they had left their homes in Bavaria.

### The Amish Contingent

The largest group of immigrants of this period was that of the Amish, individuals here and there from Rhenish Bavaria, but largely from France—Alsace and Lorraine. The regions of the Saar, and about Montbeliard and Belfort were especially well represented.

The Amishman who led the way in this general movement was a Christian Augsburg, an Alsatian from the vicinity of Strassburg, who in the course of a land-seeking tour through the Ohio Valley in 1818, had occasion to come up the Miami as far as what is now Butler county. Here the next year he, with five other families, located the first pioneer Amish colony of this migration, near the present village of Trenton. A number of other families followed in the year succeeding and soon established a small congregation.

In 1832, as just indicated, a colony of Hessian Menonites located near this early Amish settlement, and at first worshipped with them. But in course of time, insignificant though irreconcilable differences forced a separation. The Amish wore hooks and eyes, the Hessians buttons; the Amish forbade the use of musical instruments, the Hessians favored them. Other differences crept in and kept the two congregations apart for a number of years.

Being a pioneer settlement, Butler county became a

convenient stopping place for a time for such later Amish and Hessian immigrants as were headed for cheaper lands farther west, especially central Illinois. Among the early preachers who made this congregation a way station for their westward trek was Joseph Goldsmith, who, settling in Canada, became in 1824 the first Amish minister of that colony; in 1831 he came to Butler county, where in 1838, he was ordained as a bishop in that congregation, only to move to Lee county, Iowa, in 1847, in time to help organize the first Amish congregation in that state. Another early minister was Peter Nafziger, also an immigrant to Canada in 1826, but because of the cold north, choosing, in 1831, the more hospitable climate of Butler county. Here he served as bishop of the Hessian church until 1844, when he moved with his family to central Illinois, where he died near the close of the century at the ripe old age of ninety-eight. He was sometimes called "the Apostle" because of his love of travel among the various scattered Amish settlements of his day from New Orleans, through Illinois and Ohio to Canada, much of the way frequently on horseback and occasionally by foot. From Canada, too, for a stay of only one winter, 1833 and 1834, in Butler county, came the Ropp brothers, Christian, Andrew and Jacob, who likewise preferred the cheaper lands of Illinois, where Christian later became a bishop of the churches along the Mackinaw and adjacent prairies for many of the early trying years. Finally, Joseph Stuckey, migrating with his parents from Alsace to Butler county in 1830, spent his young manhood here until 1850, when he, too, moved to the Rock Creek congregation in Illinois, where in 1860 he was ordained to the ministry to become some years later the founder of the Illinois Central Conference group of Amish-Mennonites.

The Canadian colony referred to above was the second of the European Amish settlements made during this

period. The pioneer here was Christian Nafziger, a Bavarian who arrived in Waterloo county by way of New Orleans and Lancaster county in 1822, in search of homes for his brethren. After taking an option on a rather large tract of land in Wilmot township, right next to the Mennonite colony already established here, he returned to Europe. He was not able to return until 1826, but in the meantime, in 1824, several families had started a settlement on the lands selected. Many immigrants came in the years immediately following from Alsace-Lorraine, stragglers from Bavaria, and occasionally a Hessian, until a number of substantial settlements had been formed. Today the Amish congregations of Canada number nine, with a total population of about four thousand.\*

In the early thirties three new Amish colonies were started, one in Lewis county, New York, another in Fulton county, Ohio, and the third in central Illinois. The New York settlement was located along the Black River, one of the branches of the Mohawk in the northwestern part of the state by settlers with such names as *Fahrni*, *Verkler*, *Nafziger*, *Ringenberg*, etc. The Amish community here today includes about five hundred members, still quite conservative.

The immigrants to Fulton county came largely from the French section about Mühlhausen, with some Alsations, and a few Swiss. The first group arrived in 1834 and soon after, with such names as *Koenig*, *Bender*, *Roth* and *Gunday*, to be followed during the next twenty years by many others. The settlement today is divided into three congregations, embracing a total membership of about thirteen hundred.

\* The Canadian statistics here are given in terms of the entire population, the entire membership being arbitrarily multiplied by two.

The largest of the Amish settlements of this period was that in central Illinois. The earliest arrivals here were Alsations by way of Butler county, Peter Maurer, who located along Rock Creek, a tributary of the Mackinaw in McLean county in 1829, to be followed the next year by two others who made their journey from Ohio on foot, John Strubhar and Nicholas Maurer. In 1831 a small group of Lotharingian young people, some with their parents, arrived by way of Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, and the Ohio and Illinois rivers at what was then Ft. Clark, but now Peoria, a few miles below which, at Wesley City, they established the first Amish community west of Ohio. The members of this group were Jacob Auer, Peter Beck, David Schertz and his father, Joseph Rusche and two sisters, and Christian Roggi with three daughters.

During the next twenty years many others came from Alsace and Lorraine largely, locating along the timbered belts bordering the tributaries of the Illinois east of Ft. Clark—the Mackinaw, Partridge, Ten Mile, Dillon, and Bureau Creek, the last some distance further up the river near Hennepin. In 1833 the first Amish congregation in Illinois was organized near the present village of Metamora, earlier known as Hanover, with Christian Engle, a minister ordained in Alsace, as the first preacher.

The route usually taken by the early pioneers to the Illinois country was Lancaster county, down the Ohio and up the Mississippi and Illinois rivers to Peoria. Later a more direct all-water route was found by way of New Orleans. For a time seemingly there was a small congregation at New Orleans.

These early colonies grew rapidly by additions from Europe until a number of substantial congregations had been established along the various well-timbered creek



bottoms. The second and third generations, however, all moved out of their original homes to the more fertile open prairies to the east, in Woodford, Livingston, Tazewell, McLean and Bureau counties. After the Civil War there were several divisions within the original church—one resulting in the formation of the Central Conference; and the other in the Defenseless Mennonites. The entire membership today in Illinois of the original Amish church and their descendants in these divisions approximates some six thousand.

The Amish, as well as the Mennonite immigrants of this period, were of the same original Swiss stock as their Pennsylvania brethren of the preceding century. The Pennsylvanians were from the Palatinate, while the nineteenth century Amish came largely from the French provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, though the Mennonite group was largely from Bavaria, as just indicated. All were descendants, however, of the Swiss exiles of 1671 and 1710, and spoke some form of German—the Bavarians the Palatine tongue; the French in Alsace the Alsatian *patois*; while those from the Saar region farther inland nearer the French language frontier, spoke a language that included a number of French words and expressions. All, however, were of Swiss-German origin, with practically no intermixture of native French blood.

Although of the same stock as their Pennsylvania brethren, yet the immigrants of the nineteenth century, and especially the Amish, introduced a number of new family names little known among the Pennsylvanians, chief among which, the first fourteen are given, roughly in the order of their numerical importance and all in their modern spelling: *Nafziger*, *Schertz* (central Illinois), *Bachman*, *Gerber*, *Stuckey*, *Schrock*, *Wagler* (*Wagner* now), *Springer*, *Augsburger*, *Gascho*, *Oesch*, *Rockey*, *Rupp* (*Ropp*), *Ramseyer*, *Auer* (*Oyer*), *Albrecht*, *Belsley*,

Burckey, Beck, Bender, Bechler, Brenneman, Egly, Fahrney, Guth, Gunday, Gingerich, Gautschy, Heiser, Holly, Imhoff, Iutzi, Jotter (Yoder) Kennel, Kinsinger, Klopfenstein, Kamp, Litwiller, Mosiman, Maurer (Moore), Neuhauser, Roth, Risser, Ruvenacht, Raber, Rediger, Ringenberg, Sommer, Smith, Slagel, Swartzentruber, Salzman, Strubhar, Sweitzer, Staley, Steinman, Slabach, Streit, Verkler, Wise, Zehr, etc.

All these Amish brought with them their European religious practises and social customs, most of which were still decidedly conservative. Religious worship was carried on in private homes for many years; the first meeting house in Illinois being erected by the Rock Creek congregation in 1853. Hooks and eyes, and long hair and beards for the men, and aprons, old fashioned bonnets and clothes severely plain for the women were rigorously prescribed until well into the last quarter of the century. *Meidung* and *Tracht* (shunning and clothing) were two favorite topics of discussion among the older brethren in all social conversation, and among the ministers in church parleys. Everything new in religious and social practise was regarded with extreme suspicion. There is a tradition in the Partridge congregation in Illinois that in the late fifties a certain Schertz, who, instead of following his immigrant brethren out to the creek bottoms east of Peoria, decided to take up business of his own in the city, and had thus acquired a certain taste for city ways, was put out of meeting one Sunday morning because he insisted on parting his hair and wearing a starched shirt front.

By the turn of the century, however, the children's children of the early fathers had discarded the most rigid of these regulations, and had begun increasingly to associate with their more progressive Mennonite brethren, and had begun to speak of themselves as Amish-Men-

nonites. With the exception of the settlements in New York and Canada, these have now all affiliated with other more progressive groups, and the name Amish is no longer known among them.

### **The Dutch Group**

Mention should be made here also in this list of immigrant groups of a party of fifty-two Dutch Mennonites who, in 1853, left the congregation in Balk, Holland because of their opposition to war service, and their reluctance to follow their more liberal-minded fellow Dutch Mennonites in discarding other traditional Mennonite doctrines. This little party located near Elkhart, Indiana, and their descendants today form a large part of the conservative Old Mennonite congregation of Salem.

### **A Few Statistics**

Judging entirely by the membership of the present congregations that grew out of all these early settlements made by the Amish and Mennonites throughout the country, a rough estimate of the number of arrivals of all these various groups between 1817 and 1860 would be about as follows: Amish, 1500; Swiss, 1200, Bavarian Mennonites, 250; Hessians, 150; and Dutch Mennonites, 52.

### **Mennonites as Pioneers**

The reader has already observed, no doubt, that the Mennonites and Amish have been among the pioneers in the westward march of the American frontier, and among the very first settlers in the opening up of new lands. By founding Germantown in 1683 they not only became pioneer settlers in Pennsylvania, but established the first regular German colony in America. In 1710 they were the first whites to locate on the Conestoga, and followed hard on the heels of the Scotch-Irish hunters and traders who had blazed the way for the first permanent

settlers. Before the middle of the century they had joined the first Germans to venture into the beautiful Shenandoah. In 1772 they crossed the Alleghenies to establish one of the earliest communities along the Juniata. Before the Revolution they had reached the headwaters of the Ohio in the southwestern corner of Pennsylvania before that region had been vacated by the Indians.

In Ohio, they ascended the Hocking and located in what is now Fairfield county just ten years after the founding of Marietta farther down the river. In Illinois they began to clear the timber along the banks of the Illinois River in 1831, just ten years after the first log cabin had been erected in that part of the state. In 1839 they located in the southeastern part of Iowa before the raw prairies in that region had been occupied by the white man. And so, all through the west and northwest, in Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Oregon, Oklahoma and the Canadian northwest, wherever new lands have been opened up for settlement there Mennonites have been among the first to set up their log cabins and sod shanties, and always the first to establish pioneer churches.

## XII

# PENNSYLVANIA GERMAN GROUPS

### MENNONITE BRANCHES

#### **Minor Pennsylvania German Mennonite Groups**

When we take a look at American Mennonites, our first impression is that they are divided into a great number of groups and we wonder why this must be, especially since Mennonites emphasize the peace principle. There is no doubt that our Christian life should be in harmony with our confession of faith. However, to understand why we are divided into so many groups which have so little contact with each other, the following has to be taken into account.

By far not all existing separate groups originated through divisions. We have to remember that Mennonites came to America from various countries and at various times settling in the United States and Canada at various places where they retained their practises, adjusting themselves to the local environment slowly and reluctantly. In many cases they did not know about each other nor did pioneer conditions permit them to fellowship together. It is only recently when through the coming of the automobile and other more rapid means of communication and transportation, as well as through the experiences which Mennonites shared during and after World War I and II, that large scale opportunities to meet and get acquainted presented themselves. The Mennonite groups that came to America were anxious to maintain and perpetuate their particular practises and beliefs.



It is true, however, that divisions have also occurred. These divisions occurred mostly when the Mennonites were challenged in their views and practices by some movement or influence coming from the environment in which they lived. Thus, for example, when a revival spread in their community, they were challenged to accept or reject the accompanying new and strange methods of promoting the Christian cause. Some would wholeheartedly accept the new methods while others would denounce and reject them. Usually a minority broke away, accepting some of these innovations. Sometimes a minority would separate from the main stream because it considered that too many of the innovations had already been accepted. Thus, a more conservative group originated.

The main stream of the Mennonite congregations of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century in Pennsylvania, shared in the Pennsylvania German culture which had developed in the state of Pennsylvania among Reformed, Lutherans, and others, all being of German background. In their religious life the Mennonites kept their old beliefs and practises, adjusting them only gradually to the demands of their day. It was taken for granted that a Mennonite was a farmer and needed no more than an elementary education. The elders, ministers, and deacons were chosen by lot and were the guardians of the heritage, invoking disciplinary action in case of deviation from the main path. Non-conformity was not so much spoken of because it was still a reality. The right of the individual and the American principle of democracy were exercised only to a small degree.

Mennonites and Amish were peculiar in language, appearance, behavior, and religious practises and beliefs. As long as the adjustment of the environment was a gradual process, no great disturbance was caused. But

whenever innovations were presented in too obvious ways and with impatience by their advocates, great disturbances and possible divisions were the result. Such innovations could be: change from the German to the English language, the introduction of Sunday schools, greater emphasis on the need of personal conversion, missionary activities, secondary education, more democratic conference organizations, or any other method to promote the Christian cause hitherto unknown to the group.

The main Mennonite settlements of Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Ontario moved cautiously and slowly in their adjustment to the American environment during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, letting go those who would not consent to this rate of adjustment. Those Mennonites moving on to the frontier in the west, settling in smaller groups, were usually more ready to accept economic, cultural, and religious changes. Thus we find that the Pennsylvania Mennonites who settled in states like Indiana, Ohio, and farther west are much more progressive than those who remained in the homeland.

Let us now briefly summarize the major divisions among the Mennonites of Pennsylvania German background and the causes for such divisions. This chapter will be closed with an account of the major group—the Old Mennonite.

### **The Christian Funk Following**

Because the Mennonites, with their non-resistant principles did not actively participate in the Revolutionary War on either side, and because they refused to join the army and hesitated generally to take the oath required in the various tests of allegiance to the new state governments after 1776, they were suspected of loyalist preferences, and frequently classified with the Tories. In the compact settlements, where their principles were well

known, they were not seriously molested by their non-Mennonite neighbors; but in isolated communities, where they were in the minority, they were frequently given the same harsh treatment by local authorities and irresponsible mobs as though they were bonafide loyalists.

From actual military drill, which was prescribed by the Pennsylvania Assembly, the Mennonites and other peace denominations were exempt, but they were to pay an extra sum of money called a fine for this privilege. These fines were paid with little objection, but as to whether they could consistently pay the special war tax which was levied upon all the inhabitants, there was some difference of opinion. Many of them joined the Quakers in their opposition to helping the war with their means as well as by actual bearing of arms. In 1776 a meeting was held in Indianfield township in the above county for the purpose of choosing three men to represent the township in a general state convention which was to determine whether Pennsylvania should join the other colonies in declaring her independence from England. Most of the Mennonites who were present declared that since they were a "defenseless" people and could neither institute nor destroy any government, they could not interfere in tearing themselves away from the king.

Among those present was a minister, Christian Funk, who, though a staunch defender of the cause of Congress, did not at this time seem to offer any serious objection to the above declaration. The following year, however, when some of his fellow ministers declared that their non-resistant principles forbade them pay a special war tax of "three pounds and ten shillings," Funk protested and maintained that the tax should be paid. "Were Christ here," he said, "He would say, 'Give to Congress that which belongs to Congress and to God that which belongs to God.'" Andrew Ziegler, the spokesman for the

opposite party, replied,—“I would as soon go to war as pay the three pounds and ten shillings.” Funk was finally excommunicated, in 1778, for these views, and together with those who believed as he did, he organized several small congregations of his own throughout the county. This small group of people, called *Funkites*, retained a separate organization until 1850, when long after the participants in the original dispute had died, it became extinct.

The majority of the Mennonites of Pennsylvania objected not only to the payment of the special war tax, but also to the new oath of allegiance which was required of all citizens after the Declaration of Independence. Not that they did not wish to be loyal citizens of Pennsylvania, but in addition to their opposition to all oaths, they feared that this one in particular would commit them to the cause of the war. Many refused to take the oath, and some who took it were excommunicated from the church. The state authorities, however, knowing their scruples against both the oath and war, and that they were not disloyal, were inclined to treat them leniently.

That the local citizens were not always as considerate of conscientious scruples as the state authorities is shown by a handbill which was distributed among the citizens of Lancaster county by the local committee of inspection and observation in 1775. This interesting handbill, which appears among the exhibits in the museum of Independence Hall in Philadelphia is self-explanatory and reads as follows:

The Committee having received information that divers persons, whose religious tenets forbid their forming themselves into Military Associations, have been maltreated and threatened by some violent and ill-disposed people in the County of Lancaster, notwithstanding their otherwise willingness to contribute cheerfully to the common cause than by taking up arms.

The Committee, duly considering the same, do most heartily recommend to the good inhabitants of the County that they use every possible means to discourage and prevent such licentious proceedings and assiduously cultivate that harmony and union so absolutely necessary in the present crisis in public affairs. At the same time they consider it to be their indispensable duty to intimate to the public their entire disapprobation of any abuse, opprobrious or insulting expressions that may be made use of by any persons whatsoever against such of the respectable inhabitants who may think proper to associate for the defense and support of their inestimable rights and privileges.

The Committee will find means to bring such impudent persons to a proper sense of their misconduct. Yet they ardently wish and hope that no further violence, threats or animosities may appear, but that every member of the Community will readily use his utmost endeavors to promote peace, good order and unanimity among the inhabitants of this respectable County.

In Lehigh County an isolated group of Mennonites near Saucon, because they hesitated to take the new oath of allegiance required by law, were classed with the Tories, by the local courts, and treated accordingly. They were sent to jail, all their goods, including their bedding, household utensils and even food, were confiscated; and they were ordered out of the state within thirty days by order of the court.

Records are not available as to the final enforcement of the order. We know that the men were in jail, however, for we have a record of a petition sent by the wives to the court for the release of their husbands, since they were entirely destitute and without support.

There are numerous family traditions among both the Mennonites and the Amish of the period, especially in Berks and surrounding counties where Mennonite settlements were not large, of jail sentence and mistreatment



by local authorities and citizens because of conscientious scruples against participating in war activities.

Although the Mennonites did not bear arms during the war, several of the engagements took place in Mennonite communities. The battle of Germantown was fought in the vicinity of the little Mennonite meeting-house which still shows the scars of the battle to this day. The Valley Forge winter quarters were located in the Skippack region. A number of the Mennonites were impressed into the service at the time, while the headquarters of a number of officers were in the homes of Mennonite farmers nearby. In Lancaster county, too, the horses and wagons of the rich farmers were frequently impressed into the quartermaster service during the Pennsylvania campaigns.

### **Martin Boehm**

Another event, the apostasy of Martin Boehm, while not a result of the war, yet occurred at this time and may as well be told here as elsewhere. Boehm was a Mennonite bishop at Willow Street in Lancaster county. During a visit to Virginia in 1761 he came into contact with a revival movement and was greatly influenced by it. By 1775 he had so aroused the ill-will of his fellow ministers by his fiery preaching that he was expelled. In the meantime the Methodists had entered Pennsylvania, and Boehm soon cast his lot with them, becoming one of the pioneer Methodist preachers in Lancaster county. In 1800, together with Otterbein, a minister of the Reformed church, he also became the founder of what was later known as the United Brethren church. In 1805 he was elected a bishop in the United Brethren church, but in the meantime also had his name enrolled in the Methodist class book. Whether he was a Methodist or United Brethren was perhaps not quite clear to his friends, as the following epitaph

which appears on the stone marking his last resting place by the side of Boehm Chapel in Lancaster county would indicate.

"Here lie the remains of Rev. Martin Boehm, who departed this life (after a short illness) March 23, 1812, in the 87th year of his age. Fifty-four years he fully preached the Gospel to thousands, and labored in the Vineyard of the Lord Jesus in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia among many denominations, but particularly the Mennonites, United Brethren and Methodists, with the last of whom he lived and died in fellowship. He not only gave himself and his services to the church, but also fed the Lord's prophets and people by multitudes. He was an *Israelite* in whom was no guile. His end was peace."

### **The Reformed Mennonites**

Another division occurred in Lancaster county in 1812, resulting in the organization of what is now known as the Reformed Mennonites. The founder of this branch was John Herr, never a member of the church himself, but the son of Francis Herr, a Mennonite minister who had been expelled from the church on the alleged ground of irregularities arising out of a business deal. Francis Herr, together with several of his friends, also ex-Mennonites, held religious meetings in his own house for some time after that. Upon his death his son, John Herr, took up his cause, and becoming "convicted of sin," attended the meetings of his father's associates. He finally had himself baptized by one of these associates, whom he in turn rebaptized, several others were added to the group, and John Herr was soon elected bishop. Thus was begun the group which soon assumed the name of Reformed Mennonites.

In numerous controversial pamphlets written soon after, the old church was charged with being dead, cor-

rupt and worldly. What Herr and his associates meant by these terms soon became clear by the practises they adopted soon after. In the main the fundamental doctrines of the Mennonite church were retained, but in a few questions of practise they carried their principles to extreme lengths. They are still extremely exclusive in their religious affiliations. All those not of their faith are of the "world." They refuse to attend religious services of any sort if conducted by a minister of any other faith. The ban and avoidance are rigidly applied. They are severely plain in their dress, and discard all unnecessary adornment in their houses or on their persons as vain or sinful. They have no Sunday schools, do not support missions, nor evangelistic efforts. They have grown slowly, and have not even held their own children. Many of the children do not join the church of their parents, and being taught that all other churches are "of the world," they infrequently refuse to join any. Their stronghold is still in Lancaster county, but they have a few scattered congregations in Ohio, Illinois, Michigan and Ontario. Their influence has been small, although in Lancaster county there was often much bitter feeling for many years between the "old" and the "new" Mennonites. The entire membership today is about seventeen hundred.

### **Religious Life in Franconia**

The next church division, commonly known as the Oberholtzer group of churches, appeared first in the Franconia Conference district which included some twenty-two church congregations, principally in Bucks and Montgomery counties, Pennsylvania, with five bishops, forty ministers, and twenty-five deacons, who were wont to meet twice each year as a Council to regulate the affairs of their churches.

The Pennsylvania churches at this time, the middle of the past century, were still quite conservative in all their religious practises and social customs. Their congregations consisted almost entirely of small farm communities, with a ministry that was uneducated and chosen by lot, clinging tenaciously to the old traditions, suspicious of the outside world, and associating very little in religious matters with the non-Mennonite community.

A glimpse of the religious conditions of that day among the Mennonites may be gleaned from a brief account written many years later by Henry R. Hunsicker.

My father was an ardent Whig, and he supported the measures that looked for the lightening of the burdens the country was under.

He attended the township primaries, the county conventions that framed the ticket, and attended political meetings, believing that as a good citizen it was his duty to do so. He was waited upon by minister Eli Landis, and elder John Gotwals, warning him of having offended the rules of the meeting, assuming that such was the duty of the people of the world.

It was about this time that linen covers on dearborns were giving way to black oilcloth covers. When my father availed himself of a black oilcloth cover for his dearborn he was charged with violating a long established custom of the Mennonites in making such a change; and when a year or so later he had elleptic springs put on the running gears of his carriage he sinned even more grievously. Then, too, came the charge that his children did not conform to the style and dress of the meeting. Though my father always wore the Mennonite garb, he laid no stress on it and allowed his boys and girls to dress like the others around them. I remember it was under discussion that my sisters wear caps at meeting, and be otherwise plain in dress. Other matters came up, such as forbidding marrying outside of the denomination, attendance at civil duties, such as voting at elections, resorting to process of law to recover property, favoring liberal education, etc. I remember a deep impres-

sion was made on me by these outside restraining influences to my ambition in striving to obtain an education, as father was charged with being worldly minded, allowing too much latitude to his children, and thus also influencing others growing up around him.

My father was regularly ordained to the ministry New Year, 1847, some months before the split took place. My uncle, John Hunsicker, who was then bishop in the district comprising Skippack, Methacton, Providence and Zieglers (now Gotwals) died in the autumn of 1847, and my father became bishop of the above named district.

This continued and intensified opposition by the Mennonites as referred to above, and perhaps some I have omitted, culminated in a schism or split at the conference at Franconia in May 1847, when John Hunsicker, my uncle, John H. Oberholtzer, William Landis, Israel Beidler, and my father Abraham Hunsicker, ministers ordained as Mennonites, were literally put out of Meeting for holding liberal views in advance of the Church.

### **The Oberholtzer Following**

Among the ministers above mentioned, the most active and influential was John H. Oberholtzer of the Swamp congregation, a young man ordained in 1842, a former school teacher, and thus perhaps somewhat better educated than his fellow ministers of an older generation. Oberholtzer was an aggressive young man, full of zeal for a more active church program; somewhat independent in spirit, and impatient of the conservative attitude of his fellow ministers. He got into trouble with his colleagues almost from the start. Being an effective speaker, he was invited frequently to hold meetings in neighboring school houses and in the non-Mennonite churches of the community by his friends and admirers, a new and unpopular practise among the Mennonites of the time. The question, however, that led directly to a break with his ministerial brethren was the cut of his clerical coat. It was a rule among the Franconia Mennonites that the



minister must wear the "regulation" plain coat, which was collarless, and with rounded corners; a sort of a short frock coat, which, because of its rounded corners was sometimes known among the non-clericals as a "shad belly" coat. For some years Oberholtzer refused to wear this prescribed clerical garb. This part of his experience is perhaps best told in his own words:

Soon after I began to preach some of the members were displeased with the way I was operating, and for different reasons. One because I did not change my coat from what it was before; some thought it unbecoming for me to wear a collar on my coat, or to have buttons on both sides. Most objections were made against the form, some contending that it ought to be round. But as the Mennonite creed did not say what form of coat the minister had to wear, in view of the Gospel I exercised my own privilege as to what would be appropriate, and continued to wear my usual dress.

This coat question remained a source of irritation among the Franconia brethren for some years, and did not grow mellow with age. Oberholtzer had a number of sympathizers, especially in the Swamp and Skippack congregations, including his own bishop John Hunsicker. Oberholtzer stubbornly refused to wear the coat; the Council, equally insistent, demanded that he must. Finally, in 1844, those refusing to comply with the demands of the Council were denied the right to vote at Council meetings.

This was the situation in 1847. Influenced by some of his more moderate advisers, the young preacher had by this time decided to submit to the coat regulation; but much ill will had already been aroused by the controversy, and besides, another question, too, had arisen to disturb the peace of the brotherhood. The Franconia Conference was loosely organized. It had no constitution, no set rules of procedure. no commonly accepted dis-

cipline, and it kept no records of the Council proceedings. The only rule in practise was that at the Council meetings the oldest bishop, of whom there were five, as just noted, should preside.

Oberholtzer, recognizing in this lack of organization the chief source perhaps of the arbitrary powers which enabled the majority bishops to deny the minority a hearing on their demands, now proposed that the Conference adopt a written constitution and discipline, with set rules of procedure and certain minimum agreements on religious practise; and that written records be kept of all Council sessions. In this demand he had the support of his own hishop, John Hunsicker. In a preliminary gathering, preceding the regular spring meeting of the Council, such ministers and deacons as agreed with Oberholtzer, some thirteen in number, approved a prospective constitution prepared by him, and to be presented to the Council for their consideration.

But when the document was presented on the following day to the Council it was refused by majority vote even a reading. The minority group then petitioned that it might be printed and presented at the next regular fall meeting of the Council. This petition, too, was arbitrarily refused, whereupon Bishop John Hunsicker, with perhaps equal arbitrary impatience, declared "This is partisanship. It will be printed nevertheless."

And it was. Throughout the summer, no doubt, most of the ministers of the district had occasion to read the proposed constitution and familiarize themselves with its contents. But in the fall meeting the minority group, now grown to sixteen, instead of listening to the reading of their favorite plan of organization, found themselves instead summarily and arbitrarily expelled from meeting by the bishops of the majority group, for having subscribed to the ill-fated document, comforted only by the

promise of reinstatement to their former status within the Conference upon confession of their errors.

Several weeks later, October 28, 1847, the minority group met again in the Skippack church with Abraham Hunsicker as chairman, and J. H. Oberholtzer as secretary, to organize what soon became the East Pennsylvania District of Mennonites.

This is the story as it is told in the controversial literature of the time. But the source of the quarrel lay deeper than in a difference of opinion about the cut of a coat, or the wisdom of adopting a written constitution. The new party did not differ from the old in its belief in adult baptism, non-resistance, opposition to the oath, rejection of secret societies, and in the retention of foot washing. The chief distinction lay rather in a more tolerant attitude of the "News," as they were called by the "Olds," toward the non-Mennonite world, both political and religious. Among the more liberal practises sanctioned by the former in the course of a few years were the use of the courts in "a just cause," removal of all dress restrictions among both clergy and laity, a supported, and a little later an educated ministry, open communion, and outside marriages. Foot washing was soon made optional, and finally abandoned altogether.

The Oberholtzer following were among the first Mennonites also to adopt progressive methods of church work, and to espouse new religious causes. Oberholtzer himself, as early as 1847, had gathered the young people of his church on Sunday afternoons for religious instruction, and by so doing is to be credited perhaps with starting one of the first Sunday schools among the American Mennonites. The official Sunday school among the group was organized in the Flatland church in 1853. The Swamp congregation also about this time introduced perhaps the first organ in worship among the Mennonites of America.

By 1865 a missionary society had been organized. In 1852 Oberholtzer founded the first American Mennonite religious paper, *Religiöser Botschafter*.

The new movement affected approximately a third of the membership of the Franconia Conference district. It claimed a majority in six of the congregations, including Skippack and the two Swamps. In these the old party erected new meetinghouses. In a number of congregations the two parties worshipped in the same house on alternate Sundays.

The East Pennsylvania District did not make much numerical growth after its initial appearance. Oberholtzer and his group were instrumental in making contacts with other like-minded congregations and groups which culminated in the founding of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America in 1860 at West Point, Iowa.

### **The Hunsicker Faction and the Johnson People**

The charter members did not all agree on the extent of the progressive movement. To the ultra-liberal Abraham Hunsicker, above mentioned, and his son Henry, the latter of whom had also recently been ordained to the ministry, the tolerant views of Oberholtzer were not quite tolerant enough. Together with a small group of sympathizers, the Hunsickers were especially opposed to the restriction against secret societies. For their attitude on this question a number of the latter, scattered about through the different congregations, were expelled from the new conference. These in turn then organized several small centers of worship, which had only a temporary existence, however. In course of time the Hunsicker following disintegrated, and the membership was absorbed by several other denominations.

But while the Hunsickers found the Oberholtzer church too conservative, another group under the leadership of Henry G. Johnson thought it too liberal. As already noted the question of foot washing was a matter of frequent discussion in the early sessions of the conference; and when in the spring session of 1858 it was officially declared that the rite was no longer to be regarded as a binding ordinance, the Johnson party withdrew from the conference and established another independent religious organization. There are still several independent Johnson congregations in the district.

### **William Gehman and the Prayer Meeting Controversy**

But the end was not yet. Another disturbing question in certain Mennonite circles of the time was that of prayer meetings, and the need of a more highly emotional religious life than that prevailing in the church at large. William Gehman, a newly ordained minister in the Upper Milford congregation, began to hold private prayer meetings with an inner circle of adherents soon after his ordination. The movement soon attracted rather general attention, sufficient to merit conference notice. In 1853 the new conference after investigating the innovation, and seeing no possible harm in prayer meetings, sanctioned them. But several years later as a result of general dissatisfaction caused by an excessive emotionalism being manifested by the prayer group in their meetings, and the assumption by them of a piety superior to that of the non-participating group, the conference reversed its decision, and declared that although it favored the spirit and practise of prayer in all religious meetings held by members and ministers in regular worship, yet it discouraged special meetings held for prayer only, and the cultivation of intense emotionalism as then carried on.



Gehman and his followers refused to abide by the advice, with the result that in 1858 he and twenty-two others were dismissed from the conference. Soon after, this group organized another small wing of the church, under the name of *Evangelical Mennonites*.

The Evangelical Mennonites had a slow growth. By 1880 they numbered only one hundred and seventy-five members. Later, however, through amalgamation with several other small Mennonite offshoots similarly minded, from various part of the United States and Canada, they developed in course of time into a body of substantial size.

To say that Gehman and his following were expelled from the East Pennsylvania District conference for holding prayer meetings does not tell the whole story. The Oberholtzer churches did not oppose prayer either privately or publicly in connection with the regular service of worship; nor in special meetings if properly conducted and kept within bounds. That there was considerable unwholesome emotionalism connected with these meetings as conducted, and danger of overemphasis of them as an essential adjunct to the regular forms of religious service is suggested by a letter written by Daniel Hoch of Canada to Oberholtzer about this time. Hoch, too, at the Twenty had succumbed to the prayer meeting movement of the time, though he evidently kept it within sane bounds. In the letter in question Hoch regrets the fact that Oberholtzer, who had occasionally visited the former, had not been seen in Canada for some time; and asks whether he has been detained by fear of prayer meetings, immersion, or hand clapping and shouting, the latter of which, Hoch suggests, seems to him also to be the result of fanaticism.

It should be remembered here that the Mennonites as a whole were never given over to much emotionalism in their religious worship. They took their religion se-

riously as a normal growth, sometimes as a matter of fact perhaps. Children were taught the faith of the fathers, and in the ways of the church. In course of years as a result of parental example and catechetical instruction most of them arrived at a state of realization of the need of a personal Savior in their lives. Worship consisted of more or less formal services, and no attempts were made to stir the depths of individual religious feeling. In the main, Mennonite religious convictions were sincere and deep and abiding.

On the other hand there were always those, a few of them, who were more emotionally inclined, who were moved more by their hearts than their heads, and who longed for a more definite and intense religious experience based on a more definite conviction of sinfulness than that demanded by the larger group. These, under the influence of an unstable leadership frequently, craved prayer meetings and other surface outlets for their surplus religious feeling. The difference between the two groups was at that time greater than it is today.

### **The Holdeman Faction**

In 1858 John Holdeman, a layman in the Old Mennonite church of Wayne county, Ohio, decided to preach without the conventional call. He claimed to be guided in his course of action by visions and dreams in one of which he received a call to preach. He therefore began to hold meetings in his own house, and secured a few followers including members of his own family. Like Herr before him, he took up his pen in defense of his own views and became a prolific writer. The old church he maintained had departed from the truth, and his own congregation was now the true church of God, which had maintained the lineage of the saints from the days of the Apostles. His own small following which he now called the *Church*

of *God in Christ, Mennonite*, grew slowly in numbers. By 1865 his congregation consisted of but twenty members. It has since grown, however, especially in Manitoba, Kansas, and other western states among the Russian Mennonites. The present membership is about four thousand. They differ little from other Mennonites in their fundamental beliefs. Among the distinctive features introduced by Holdeman was objection to the "taking of usury," and the "laying on of hands" after baptism.

### The Wisler Mennonites

The next division began in the Yellow Creek congregation in Elkhart county, Indiana. Among the pioneer settlers in this community was bishop Jacob Wisler from Ohio, a man devoted to the principles of the church, but exceedingly conservative by nature, and opposed to the introduction of all new things, such as English preaching, four part singing, Sunday schools, evening meetings, protracted meetings, etc. In fact every slightest departure from the ways of the fathers was placed under the ban by Wisler and a considerable part of his congregation. A number of the more progressive members of the congregation, however, under the leadership of Daniel Brenne-man, a fellow minister, demanded a more progressive policy. This Wisler opposed, and threatened with excommunication those who advocated the introduction of the new methods of church work. Finally the latter's arbitrary method of enforcing his views resulted in a church trial in 1870, in which Wisler was deprived of his office. He and those who believed as he did then organized a new congregation.

The same attempts to keep the church within narrow bounds were made by other ultraconservative men in other sections of the country. All of these finding themselves weak in number, but akin in faith, finally affiliated

themselves into one body. The first contingent to join Wisler's group was a band of conservatives in Medina county, Ohio. A little later, in 1886, several groups of conservatives in Woolwich township, Waterloo county, Ontario, opposing English preaching, Sunday schools, evening meetings, "falling" top-buggies, and other evidences of modernism among the Mennonites of that community, withdrew from the church and set up a separate organization. These Woolwichers as they are locally called, soon allied themselves with the Indiana Wislerites. A second group was led by Bishop Jonas Martin of the Weaverland congregation in Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, who in 1893 because of a quarrel over a new pulpit recently installed into his church, withdrew from the church, and posing as a conservative on other questions retained one-third of his former congregation. The third group consisted of a conservative Virginia congregation in Rockingham county of about one hundred members which allied itself with the "Martinites" of Pennsylvania.

These four original groups of Wislerites, Woolwichers, and Pennsylvania and Virginia Martinites now count up all told about sixteen hundred members throughout Indiana, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Michigan, and Ontario. They are all still ultra-conservative in dress, forms of worship, and social customs and are very slow to adopt new ideas. With the exception that they do not wear hooks and eyes nor the homemade coats they are similar to the Old Order Amish in their general spirit, and might well be called the *Old Order Mennonites*.

### **The United Missionary Church**

The *Mennonite Brethren in Christ*, now *United Missionary Church*, is the result of a series of amalgamations of four small kindred groups, three of which had seceded

from the parent body for similar reasons, namely a more evangelistic and emotional type of religious life.

One of these groups, the *Evangelical Mennonites*, has just been mentioned. Two of them had their origin in Canada. *New Mennonites* was the name assumed by a group of Canadian Mennonites, who, during the middle of the past century under the leadership of Daniel Hoch, an aggressive minister in the Twenty congregation, had been expelled from the church in 1848 by Bishop Benjamin Eby for advocating and practising special evangelistic and prayer meetings contrary to the regular religious worship practise of the church at large. Hoch, himself although at first one of the leaders of this group, did not follow the rest in the series of unions which finally ended with the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. He remained closely affiliated with the Oberholtzer group in Pennsylvania, and was one of the participants in the movement that finally resulted in the formation of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, of which he remained a member throughout his life.

*Reformed Mennonites* was the name applied to a group of former members of the old church that had one root of its origin in Bruce county, Ontario, and the other in Elkhart county, Indiana. Solomon Eby, who had been chosen by lot to the ministry in the Port Elgin congregation in 1858, but according to his own testimony had not been "happily converted" until 1869, was also expelled from the main body for countenancing methods of worship unknown to the usual practise of the church. Eby had a number of followers throughout the different Canadian settlements. About the same time, too, Daniel Brenneman of the Yellow Creek congregation in Indiana, had likewise been put out of meeting by the Indiana bishops for sponsoring a more aggressive evangelistic work in his community than was thought wise by his



ministering brethren. After making several visits to Canada where a spirited revival movement was in progress among the Eby people, Brenneman and his following decided in 1874 to join their Canadian brethren in the formation of an organization called the Reformed Mennonites.

The fourth contingent of this combination was the *Brethren in Christ*, who as early as 1838 had seceded from the River Brethren, who in turn had originally sprung from the Mennonite body in the preceding century.

These four small bodies, all with a more or less direct Mennonite origin, and with similar beliefs and practises, by a series of amalgamations united to form the Mennonite Brethren in Christ church. The first step toward union occurred in Waterloo county, Ontario, when in 1875 the New and the Reformed Mennonites joined their forces under the name of *United Mennonites*. In 1879 the *United Mennonites* consolidated with the Pennsylvania Evangelical Mennonites to form the *Evangelical United Mennonites*. The unification movement was completed when at Jamton, Ohio, in 1883 the latter were joined by the *Brethren in Christ* to form the *Mennonite Brethren in Christ*, now *United Missionary Church*.

This branch of the church, with a membership of about fifteen thousand, still holds to some of the characteristic Mennonite practises such as foot washing, non-conformity, and opposition to the oath and secret societies. But, stressing as they do the necessity of a very definite sense of conversion and a decided conviction of sin, as well as a certain assurance of salvation as a condition of church membership, they play up very strongly the emotional side of their religious experiences in their public worship. Conversion, sometimes accompanied with great joy but more often achieved through intense agony, is

an important event in their lives, and is given a definite date with birth and death in all obituaries.

They sponsor frequent prayer meetings, evangelistic efforts, itinerant preaching, "protracted meetings," and old-fashioned camp meetings. Preachers are recruited through a definite "call", and are not selected by the lot as among the Old Mennonites. They were the first among the Mennonites in America to admit women to the pulpit. In their revivals and camp meetings they are still inclined to give free play to their feelings of both joy and agony. The following item taken from a rather recent report to the church paper of a Michigan camp meeting gives us a glimpse of a rather common technique used in breaking the will of a stubborn sinner, as well as a possible reason for the disfavor with which the new church was regarded in its early history by the more formal and stable Mennonites of the old order. Speaking of a revival that had continued for four weeks before there were any signs of a break, the writer reports that

One sister fought the idea of being a Mennonite and washing feet, but God held her to it, and when she became willing God poured out His spirit upon her, and after lying on the floor for over an hour she came out with cries of 'Glory! Glory!' and, 'I'm sanctified.' The meetings continued for seven weeks. In all, twenty-nine seekers came out, and all but three claimed victory; others were under conviction but would not yield.

In the course of time, too, as a result of the amalgamation of these different groups, each with certain distinct practises the United Missionary Church has adopted a number of practises and doctrines not general among other Mennonite groups—sanctification, second work of grace, second coming, holiness, open communion, immersion and so on. Like other highly emotional groups, they have frequently been subjected to movements that practise "speaking in tongues," etc.

No other branch of the denomination has reached out into non-Mennonite fields so far for its membership as has the United Missionary Church. Few of the additions since the early years have come from Mennonite sources. Many of their present congregations started as mission stations in both city and country districts. For this reason one finds fewer characteristic Mennonite names in their membership lists than among any of the other branches, most of the latter being entirely of a long Mennonite ancestry. This fact has brought with it certain problems. Many of the traditional and historical Mennonite beliefs and practises are not as easily accepted by those who have not inherited them as by those who have had a long Mennonite ancestry. During the late wars the doctrine of non-resistance was much more difficult to maintain in Canada and Michigan where there was a large element of non-Mennonite ancestry than in Indiana and Pennsylvania where the opposite was true.

The United Missionary Church is among the best organized of all the branches of the church, being semi-episcopal in its church polity. The highest administrative officials are presiding elders elected annually over districts. Ministers are licensed to preach upon satisfactory evidence that they have a definite call to that service. The *Gospel Banner*, founded in 1878 by Daniel Brenneman in Goshen, Indiana, is still the official church organ. Bethel College, founded in 1947 at Mishawaka, Indiana, is the conference college.

### AMISH BRANCHES

The Amish wing of the church also had its religious troubles during this period. Up to the middle of the century the whole Amish brotherhood, both the Pennsylvania contingent and the more recent Alsatian immi-

grants, although they were not united by any conference bonds, yet felt themselves to be one body in faith and practise. On both sides of the Atlantic their common traditions and practises had been preserved by their conservatism, so that when the Alsatians migrated to America near the middle of the century they found themselves perfectly in accord with their brethren who had come to Pennsylvania a hundred years earlier. They both still stressed particularly the religious doctrine that had caused their separation from the Mennonites in Switzerland in the latter part of the seventeenth century, the doctrine of *Meidung* which they still applied rigorously as a disciplinary measure.

They wore the same clothes, the same cut of hair, and manifested the same spirit of suspicion toward everything new in the way of personal or house adornment as they appeared, every household convenience and farm appliance which characterized their Swiss and German forefathers of the early eighteenth century.

Meetinghouses were just coming in, and only a few had been erected by the more isolated and progressive communities by this time. Services were held in individual homes in the community, in the houses in winter, and in the capacious barns in the summer time. Worship lasted for several hours, and ended with a common meal at the home of the host. The preachers of course were untrained and unpaid, and elected by lot for life or good behavior. The hymns, long drawn out, sung to melodies never committed to print, and perhaps several hundred years old, were from the *Ausbund*, *das dicke Liederbuch*. More than one part singing or with notes was strictly forbidden. The language in use was some sort of German, Pennsylvania Dutch among the Pennsylvanians and Alsatian or Bavarian dialect among the more recent immigrants.

In spite of their ultraconservatism which preserved the fundamentals of their faith without much change, yet as a result of their loose organization, their scattered settlements in the pre-railroad days, and sometimes pure personal perverseness, slight differences in practise developed. These differences, though very slight to an impartial observer, were taken very seriously by these conservative, unlettered farmer preachers.

By 1850 the Amish brotherhood throughout various communities began to be stirred by the general feeling of unrest then commonly prevailing throughout the religious life of the country. In Mifflin county, Pennsylvania some Amishman, a bit more independent in his thinking than the average of his people, conceived the idea that baptism by sprinkling in a house was unscriptural, but that the rite should be administered by sprinkling in a flowing stream outside. He gained a few followers in his own congregation, and soon the movement spread into other communities. In Butler county, Ohio, the recently established Hessian church had imported a piano, an unheard-of innovation among the American Amish of that day. The large ultraconservative community in Holmes county, Ohio, found their Wayne county brethren entirely too worldly. In the words of a Holmes county pamphleteer written in 1860:

es wurde nicht für gut oder notwendig angesehen dasz die Diener in dem Abrath gehen. Und es wurde zu zeiten Rat gehalten bei offnen Thüren in der Gegenwart von auswärtigen Personen. Die alten dicken Liederbüchern wurden verworfen und die Springweisen eingefuehrt. Auch die Gebetbücher brauchten sie nicht mehr. Bann und Meidung wurden selten geübt. Hochmut, Pracht und Uebermut nahm überhand. Es hiesz es kommt nicht auf das äusserliche an, wenn nur ihr Herz gut ist. Die Häuser wurden prächtig ausgeziert. Alles das und noch viel mehr von solcher art entstand durch den obengemeldeten J. Yoder und seinen Anhang.



There were differences of opinion also between the Elkhart and Lagrange county, Indiana, communities.

It was for the purpose of harmonizing these various disagreements and for bringing about a closer cooperation among various communities that a general conference was called of all the Amish congregations in the United States and Canada. The first session in this series was held in a capacious barn in Wayne county in 1862, at which seventy-two ministers were present from Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Pennsylvania and Maryland. Annual sessions were held for twelve years after that, ending in Eureka, Illinois, in 1878, without accomplishing the purpose for which the conferences were originally called.

In the meantime the various Amish communities throughout the country had become crystallized into several permanent factions. On the one hand the congregations in McLean county, and the Hessian congregation in Butler county, both of which had discarded some of their severe dress regulations and otherwise assumed a somewhat more tolerant attitude toward other liberal church practises, losing interest in the conference, ceased to attend the later sessions, and began an independent church career. On the other hand, a goodly number of the extreme conservatives also withdrew their support; and, together with such as never had favored the conference idea in the start, maintained the good old customs of the fathers without the least modification. These have since been known as the *Old Order Amish*. Between these two extremes were left a considerable number of congregations, including nearly all of the Alsatian immigrant communities, and the Wayne, Champaign and Logan county Pennsylvanians, which occupied a middle position, following a fairly moderate course of religious practise and later, assumed the name of *Amish-Mennonite*. These

later merged with the Old Mennonites and as already noted ceased their separate existence.

### The Central Conference of Mennonites

The *Central Conference of Mennonites*, locally known for a long time among the other groups in Illinois as the *Stuckey Amish*, had their origin in the Rock Creek congregation in McLean county. The bishop here was Joseph Stuckey, one of the most promising young leaders of the entire Amish church. He was a man of strong personality, a writer of some ability, and talented with more than ordinary organizing power. Being rather more liberal minded on religious questions than most of his fellow ministers, he occasionally was brought into friction with other leaders even before 1870, the time his troubles began with his fellow ministers. A dispute arose between Stuckey and the Amish ministers' conference relative to the expulsion of a liberal minded member of the former's congregation by the name of Joseph Yoder. The conference ordered Yoder's excommunication on the ground that he did not believe in eternal punishment, having expressed this sentiment in a poem called *Die frohe Botschaft*. Stuckey, however, refused to carry out the order. The question was taken up at the annual session of 1870-71-72 without a final agreement. Finally a committee of easterners was appointed to make a thorough investigation of the whole matter and dispose of the case. This committee, made up of ultraconservative Pennsylvanians, decided, adversely to Stuckey and his congregation, which stood by him in this controversy. The committee further decided that Stuckey and his congregation, unless he complied with their findings, would no longer be regarded as members of the conference.

Most of the other Illinois congregations regarded this decision as final, and it was announced in the various

churches that Stuckey and his following were no longer one of them. Stuckey did not attend the later conference sessions, which ceased a few years later on. There was no further formal division, however. The Illinois congregations were independent of each other and each went its own way. Had it not been for the influence later of the conservative Amish ministers of the East it is more than likely that today there would be little difference even in matters of dress between the Amish-Mennonites and the followers of Joseph Stuckey. When, however, in the late eighties the Western District Conference of the Amish was organized, Stuckey's congregations were not included, and since then they have been considered a separate branch of the church. Stuckey not only retained control of his home church during this controversy, but also of a small congregation at Meadows which he had been serving as an elder. Soon other congregations joined his in a more liberal church policy, and new ones were formed. What was for a long time known as the "Stuckey" following grew and prospered largely at the expense of the old church until today there is a membership of about three thousand, nearly all in central Illinois and Indiana, although there are several churches in Nebraska. In 1899 these congregations organized a conference and assumed the name of Illinois Conference of Mennonites, since changed to *Central Conference of Mennonites*, now a district of the General Conference. Outside of the removal of dress restrictions this group differs little from the former Amish Mennonites and the Old Mennonites in their faith and practise. The Conference maintains several city missions and in conjunction with the Defenseless Mennonites a station in the African Congo. They also maintain an Old People's Home at Meadows, and a large well-equipped hospital at Bloomington. They have also been loyal supporters of Bluffton College, being repre-

sented on the board of trustees. Their ministers for the most part are young men well trained, salaried, and are among the most progressive in the entire Mennonite denomination.

In 1947 the Central Conference of Mennonites officially became affiliated with the General Conference Mennonite Church and in 1957 it united with the Middle District under the name, Central District Conference.

### **Evangelical Mennonite Church**

Even earlier another little storm center had developed among the Amish, first in Adams county, Indiana, and later also in Illinois and Ohio. The leader of this new movement was Henry Egli, a minister in the Amish congregation of that place. About 1864 Egli began to urge the necessity of a definite conversion experience in the religious life. His charge that the religious life of the time was too formal and was not based on a vital experience may have had some ground, but the contention that the austere, simply dressed brethren of that day were too liberal in their dress regulations can hardly be taken seriously. In 1866 Egli withdrew from the old church, and formed a new one which soon included the larger part of his former congregation. The movement later spread to Livingston and Tazewell counties, Illinois, where several large congregations have since developed.

At first Egli's followers were quite strict in their dress regulations, rather exclusive in their religious affiliations, and rebaptized all those of their members who had come from the old church who could not confess that they had been truly converted before, a confession which of course under the circumstances few would make. In recent years the old differences have largely disappeared, and the younger generation has forgotten that they are not of one faith. They are optional immersionists, and have



discarded the former dress restrictions. In every other respect their faith and practise is identical with that of the former Amish-Mennonites and the other more conservative wings of the Mennonite denomination, with perhaps a bit more stress on "experimental" religion than is common among the others. At first they were spoken of as the "Egli Amish" by members of the church which they left, but they in turn officially assumed the name *Defenseless Mennonites*. In 1948 the name was changed to *Evangelical Mennonite Church*. The membership then was about two thousand and their official church organ is *Zion's Tidings*.

### The "New Amish"

Brief mention should be made here of another small disturbance among the Amish of Illinois and several other states in the early fifties. The *Neutäufer* described in the chapter on Switzerland, sent several emissaries of their faith to their former Swiss countrymen in Wayne county, Ohio, in 1846, where they won a few converts. A little later others came to the Amish settlement in New York, from whence, together with a few recruits from the latter place, they found their way to the Amish community in Woodford county, Illinois. Here, too, they succeeded in bringing about the secession of a few of the dissatisfied members of the Amish church, and relatives of the New Yorkers. From Illinois, too, the movement was carried to the Butler county, Ohio, Amish settlement.

This group, which was locally known among the Amish as the *New Amish*, but among themselves as the *Gläubige*, (the believers), had but a slow growth. By 1877 there were only eighty-nine members in all the various communities. Their number and influence would have been insignificant, and might have disappeared entirely had it not been for the immigration from Switzer-



land some time later of many recruits from their mother church. Today there are a number of large and prosperous congregations in central Illinois and Indiana with several in other near-by states.

Religiously the Apostolic church as it is now officially known, is very seclusive, and its members have no affiliation with other religious groups. They exercise a strict discipline among themselves, applying the practise of avoidance to the letter, to all business and social relationships as well as to religious fellowship; not even excepting husband and wife in case one or the other should be expelled from their communion.

In business matters and as farmers they are among the most industrious and uniformly prosperous members of the community. Wherever they locate they have the finest farms and the best livestock; and the price of land immediately goes up.

Their only connection with the Amish and Mennonites is that both in Switzerland and in America their first converts came from these sources; and they do share some of the fundamental religious doctrines with them—non-resistance, avoidance, once common also among the Amish and still practised among the Old Order, a general spirit of non-conformity to the world, insistence upon plain though not necessarily peculiar dress, and several other similar doctrines.

### **The Old Order Amish**

This list of Amish divisions and defections leaves the main trunk of the conservative Amish with religious beliefs and social customs almost as they were in Switzerland, the land of their origin, several centuries ago. These are now generally known as the *Old Order Amish*, occasionally among their neighbors in Ohio as "Low" Amish, and in Indiana as "Blue" Amish because of their prefer-

ence for blue as a common color for their painted fence gates and porch trimmings. The Old Order now have a membership of approximately fourteen thousand, grouped together in colonies stretching almost in a beeline straight west from Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, through Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa. In fundamental religious doctrines they do not differ from their other Amish or Mennonite brethren, except that they still strictly observe the religious practise of avoidance, a practise also shared by a number of other conservative branches of the Mennonite denomination.

But in their religious and social customs, and their general life outlook, and especially their suspicion of everything new, the Old Order have remained decidedly conservative. Their distinctive social practises and peculiar styles of dress never have their origin in any departure from the established social order. They are never new, but on the contrary have always been relics and reminders of a usage general among the common people, sometimes ages ago. Beards were generally worn in Switzerland when Jacob Amman withdrew from his Mennonite brethren in the latter part of the seventeenth century. When shaving became common, fear of being regarded worldly prevented the Amish from following the new custom. Hooks and eyes were common, too, at the time, as were long hair, homemade clothes and broad-brimmed hats. The collarless coat was the usual style worn by everybody in America until the days of Andrew Jackson when the straight collar had grown so high that it had to be turned down to form the lapel of the modern coat; but fear of pride kept the Amish as well as the Lancaster county Mennonites from adopting the worldly collar.

And so, social customs, styles of dress, mind sets, all became fossilized, and have largely remained so until the

present day among the Old Order. Such customs as have changed did so only under bitter protest. New demands made by improved methods of agriculture, more convenient household appliances, changing styles of dress, and more enlightened social customs were either not complied with at all, or were acceded to only after a long and bitter church struggle in which the pioneers of change may have been placed under the church ban.

Among these relics still surviving here and there among the various congregations are beards, hooks and eyes, broad-falls,\* long hair, aprons, homemade clothes, broad-brimmed hats, dearborn top-buggies, bundling, etc. Among the new things, new once but old now among the general run of people, still quite generally tabooed by the Old Order with a few occasional exceptions are buttons, suspenders, store clothes, starched shirt fronts, detachable shirt collars, hats for women, parted hair, carpets, window curtains, wall pictures, sofas, writing desks, brightly painted farm machinery or houses, power farm machinery, steam heat in homes, bathtubs, "falling" top buggies, buggy springs, steps and lazy backs, whip-sockets, dash boards, bicycles, telephones, automobiles, radios, meetinghouses, church conferences, Sunday schools, evening meetings, English preaching, note books, four part singing, musical instruments except the mouth harp, high school attendance, etc. Uniformity in dress, common usage and every form of personal appearance is prescribed. Children are dressed exactly like their elders, hooks and eyes and broad brimmed hats and all.

At times their consciences get the Amish into trouble with the authorities when government regulations in their minds conflict with the laws of God. In Pennsylvania they refused to accept the government farm bonus for curtail-

\* Old fashioned sailor trousers. For lack of a better name sometimes called "barndoor britches."

ing their crops, although they voluntarily reduced their acreage; but they killed no pigs. In Holmes county they encountered more serious difficulty recently when they refused to send their children to the centralized high schools for the period of years prescribed by state law.

Sometimes when a new farm utensil appears that proves to be especially useful, and especially if its ownership and use can not be accredited to a spirit of pride, there is a tendency to be a bit more liberal in accepting new things. Thus the tractor has been a strong temptation to many an Amish farmer. In Indiana, tractors were permitted for a time for belt uses only, that is for running machinery, threshing and grinding, but not for field work; in Iowa it was allowed for field work but not with rubber tires. This attempt to satisfy both his sensitive conscience and his social urge as well as his material interests at the same time frequently leads the Amishman to strangely inconsistent compromises.

Rigidly prescribed though their daily lives may be by church regulations, yet there is room for slight differences among the Old Order Amish. The large compact settlement in the Kishacoquillas Valley in Pennsylvania may serve as a good example of this diversification. There are seven grades of Amish in this beautiful valley, including the Amish-Mennonites; and five of these at least might be classed as Old Order with beard, long hair, hooks and eyes, and without meetinghouses. They range in order on the basis of conservative practice all the way from the *Nebraskas*, who observe all the usual taboos of the Amish, and besides are distinguished by white shirts, and white dearborns, hair falling to the shoulders, no suspenders, the old-fashioned homemade shaker hat tied under the chin for women, and whose chief dish at the Sunday dinners given after the services by the host is bean soup; through the *Old School* who may wear colored



shirts, with hair a bit shorter than the above, driving yellow topped dearborns, and whose women wear small bonnets; then the *Yost Yoder* church whose members may cut their hair to the tip of the ear, are permitted one suspender if non-elastic, and no bean soup at the common Sunday dinner, a stipulation however, that may have no religious significance; then fourth, the *Peachey* church, a little more liberal still, which permits hair cut as far as the middle of the ear, dearborns black or brown, and women permitted to wear the pasteboard or "slat" bonnet; and so on through several other advancing grades until we reach the *Amish-Mennonites*, who have meeting-houses, and, with the exception of hats for the women and musical instruments in worship, have no objection to modern forms of dress or up-to-date conveniences.

This description of the Old Order thus far given would not be fair to them without an additional word on the other side. Their peculiarities are only superficial after all, and based on religious convictions. The press notices occasionally given them, and their treatment by modern writers of fiction never render them justice. Even their extreme uniform, modest dress regulations on the one hand are often to be preferred, peculiar though they may be, to the extreme demands of dame fashion on the other. They are a devout, honest people, devoted to their families, generous to all human needs, law-abiding, industrious, mindful of their own business, and usually highly successful as farmers. Their less prosperous neighbors may smile at their broad-brimmed hats and long hair, but they can have nothing but admiration for their fine farms and well-fed cattle, and comfortable bank accounts.



## THE "OLD" MENNONITES

The main body of the Pennsylvania German Mennonites remained intact in this process of adjustment, having enough in common in its cultural and spiritual background. This group, located in Pennsylvania, Virginia, Ontario, and states of the middle west such as Indiana, Ohio, and Iowa although by no means uniform and even officially organized in one conference is known collectively as the "Old Mennonites" or the "Mennonite Church."

Efforts such as missions, publications, higher education; and other activities were, however, not begun in Pennsylvania but in the middle western states. The Old Mennonites were not organized as a conference prior to 1898 when this was accomplished at Wakarusa, Indiana. Some of the more conservative eastern Old Mennonites have not yet joined this General Conference.

**John F. Funk**

As in progressive movements generally, the Old Mennonites owe their enlightenment to a few far-seeing leaders. Among these, first place should be given to John F. Funk, a young Bucks county Pennsylvania layman, who entered Chicago a short time before the Civil War to engage in the lumber business. Becoming interested, however, in religious work, he soon abandoned his first plans and established a publishing enterprise instead for the special benefit of the Mennonite reading public. In 1864 he founded the *Herald of Truth*, and its counterpart in German, the *Herold der Wahrheit*, which though privately owned was dedicated to the cause of the Mennonite church. A few years later, Funk moved his printing establishment to Elkhart, Indiana, where it was finally known as the Mennonite Publishing Company,

though still privately owned. For the next fifty years the publishing company furnished not only the Old Mennonites but many of the other groups, much of their religious literature, including translations of the volum-



Flatland Mennonite Church, Quakertown, Pennsylvania

inous works of Menno Simons, and the big Martyrs' Mirror, the two church papers already mentioned, Sunday school supplies, hymn books, various other religious tracts and books of a distinctive denominational char-

acter. Needless to say this publishing company together with the first city congregation in the Old Mennonite church that arose out of it at Elkhart, became a vital force in promoting progressive church work throughout the entire denomination.

Both church papers persistently advocated the cause of Sunday schools, missions, evangelistic efforts and other progressive church enterprises when a majority of the Old Mennonite congregations were still decidedly suspicious of the slightest departure from the religious ways of the fathers. Progressive church leaders here and there also found the pages open for the expression of their individual views on these and other vital questions.

Not the least of the contributions made by the publishing company to the cause of Mennonite progress was the bringing together at Elkhart of some of the brightest and most aggressive young men from the various congregations as employees in one capacity or another of the company. The Elkhart congregation for a while was the cultural center of the Old Mennonite church.

### **John S. Coffman**

Among these young men was a young Virginia school teacher and preacher by the name of John S. Coffman, who was brought to Elkhart as assistant editor of the *Herald of Truth*. Coffman, who was a young man of unusual charm, of an attractive personality and an amiable disposition, with high ideals, an able speaker, well-versed in the use of the English language at a time when German was still largely in vogue in the Old Mennonite pulpits of the middle west, better educated than most of the Mennonite ministers of his day, and sincerely devoted to his church, did not confine himself to the editorial desk, but early in the eighties and nineties visited numerous congregations both in the United States

and in Ontario to hold some of the first evangelistic meetings in this particular branch of the church. Young people especially were greatly attracted by the winning personality of this unusual preacher; and everywhere he went, a new interest was aroused in more progressive church work; and talented young men here and there were influenced to dedicate their lives to a career of usefulness in the mission field, in the school room, and the ministry.

Among others of the younger generation who ably supported Coffman in these efforts were a number of former school teachers for the most part, the only vocation open to the Old Mennonite young men at that time outside of the farm, Daniel D. Miller, and Jonas S. Hartzler of northern Indiana; C. Z. Yoder, John Blosser, M. S. Steiner, of Ohio, the last of whom had been introduced to intellectual pursuits by a few terms at a private normal school at near-by Ada; Abram B. Kolb of Ontario, member of the *Herald* staff; J. A. Ressler and D. H. Bender of Pennsylvania; J. S. Shoemaker of Illinois, and Daniel Kaufman, of Missouri, for many years editor of the *Gospel Herald*.

These were among the chief promoters of the various church enterprises during this period. The first of the new ventures of general interest was a series of Sunday school conferences in the early nineties held alternately in Indiana and Ohio for several years, to be followed later by state conferences. It was at these meetings that the young people of the church were given their first chance to take part and express their views on various phases of church activity. The same year that saw the first of these meetings also witnessed the founding of the first mission station in Chicago with M. S. Steiner as superintendent, and the establishing of the *Young People's Paper* sponsored by the Mennonite Publishing Company. The first foreign mission station in India followed in 1898.

The interest in higher education, too, occupied increasing attention. In 1895 Coffman, Hartzler and a number of other public-spirited Mennonites from northern Indiana formed a school association to take over a private normal school founded at Elkhart the year before, and called the *Elkhart Institute*, and convert it into an academy and Bible school to "provide a higher education for our young people without exposing them to the dangerous influences surrounding so many of the schools of our country."

From this time on the interest of the Old Mennonites, especially in the middle west, in education, missions, evangelism, philanthropic and other church efforts has maintained a steady growth.

Alongside of the progressive movement above described there developed also a growing demand for a closer cooperation of the various congregations and district conferences of both the Old Mennonites and the Amish-Mennonites, the latter of which in the meantime had given up their own separate distinct conferences and had united with the Mennonite organization, thus giving up the name Amish-Mennonite altogether. This goal was reached when at Wakarusa, Indiana, in 1898 the first General Conference of such of the Old Mennonite congregations as wished to join was held, subject to a call of the previous year of a number of church leaders of both the Old Mennonites and Amish-Mennonites for a meeting of "the congregations of the United States and Canada comprising the sixteen or more conferences represented by the *Herald of Truth*." The *Herald of Truth* stood for the traditional and conventional Mennonite doctrines; and in the absence of any common ecclesiastical organization, it easily served as a basis for a united religious effort among like-minded Mennonites.



## General Conference

This General Conference movement among the Old Mennonites has not yet succeeded in interesting all the local districts. The Lancaster and Franconia conferences and several others, comprising nearly one-half the membership of this entire branch have not yet officially joined the movement, though individual members of these conferences frequently appear on the General Conference programs and take an active part in the deliberations.

Although the Old Mennonites in the main have adopted a rather progressive program of church activities, they still remain quite conservative in upholding many of the traditional religious and social practises and customs of bygone days. The *Dordrecht Confession of Faith* of 1632 remains their official statement of doctrines. Foot washing is retained and the women's prayer head covering is prescribed. It is still common for women to wear bonnets instead of hats, and east of the Alleghenies also capes. Many of the men wear plain coats and are as a rule beardless and without a mustache. The wearing of jewelry and other ornaments and the use of musical instruments are gradually being accepted by some groups in some areas. Musical instruments are as a rule not used in worship services.

## Non-conformity

In recent decades, perhaps because of the constant encroachment of the outside social world upon the hitherto protected closed Mennonite communities, the leaders of the church are increasingly stressing the importance of *non-conformity*, which the editor of the church paper defined as

a Scriptural doctrine requiring a separation between the church and the world. Believers having accepted Christ as their personal Savior have thereby renounced their former adherence to the world with its sinful lusts and follies, and are, therefore, not to be conformed to the world in business methods, in political affiliations, in methods of living, in dress, etc., their attitude being described in the language of inspiration as "unspotted from the world."

The large compact settlements in Pennsylvania and Virginia are much more seclusive in this respect than the congregations of the middle west. In fact, as already noted, these eastern conferences are still suspicious of the orthodoxy of the western brethren in their own branch of the church, and do not officially fraternize with them. A few samples of the regulations on the part of the church of the religious and business life of their members, taken from disciplines of the conservative Franconia and Lancaster conferences, which are not necessarily all fully enforced today, may be of interest.

Among the forbidden practices of these conferences are marriage outside the membership of the church, membership in secret societies, life insurance, labor unions, and the attending of moving pictures, shows, and other commercial amusements. The disciplines of the various conferences differ and there is constant and gradual adjustment for which reason it is hard to state what is forbidden, tolerated, or generally accepted.

On the other hand, in the interest of standards of honesty too much neglected in the world today, members are urged to pay all their just obligations; and not to take advantage of exemptions and bankruptcy laws that might permit them to evade the payment of their honest debts.

Equally sensible is the recommendation to the church leaders that they confine themselves in their teaching to "essentials relative to the welfare of the church, and

not to speculate on unfulfilled prophecy as the doctrine of the millennium, and the doctrine of eternal security."

To this list of social taboos, the Lancaster discipline adds several others, including literary societies; choral, quartette, duet or solo singing in churches or any public gathering; protracted meetings without the consent of the *Bench*\*; performing of wedding ceremonies by some one other than the presiding bishop; wedding marches and flower girls; and Sunday school libraries unless selected by some one authorized by the conference, and then to be free of fiction. The following dress regulation, though perhaps a bit severe yet in these days of feminine nudism has much to commend it: "a plain dress is made of plain goods full to the neck, the sleeves long to the wrist, the skirts to be long enough to be modest in every way, the waistline to be properly observed and retained. The cape must not be omitted; transparent goods can not be used in making plain dresses. Fancy colored stockings must not be worn."\*\*

Most of the regulations listed in the disciplines above mentioned are quite literally enforced in the Pennsylvania conferences.

Ministers are still, in the majority of cases, chosen by lot from the congregation; many of them have had no special preparation for their work, and serve without pay. There is a growing demand, however, for a better trained ministry, and with this demand will come the necessity of some degree of financial support.

There are evidences especially in the middle west

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\* The *Bench* in Lancaster county came to signify the Board of Bishops.

\*\* Mennonites, Amish and Dunkards in Pennsylvania are often spoken of as the "plain" people because of their plain clothes. Among the Lancaster county Mennonites the phrase "turning plain" is synonymous with joining church. Unlike the Amish, the Mennonites do not insist that their children wear plain clothes before they become church members.

that some of these severe restrictions upon the social and business life of the membership are being gradually modified in the interests of greater toleration. Dress regulations especially are getting to be hard to enforce. Formerly, in the horse and buggy days, when large compact Mennonite communities formed not only a closed social and religious group but also a complete educational and almost a self-sufficing economic unit, there was not much need for any outside contacts. Distinct beliefs, and customs, forms of dress and a strange language were not hard to maintain. But with the coming of rural delivery, the telephone, automobile, radio and especially the rural high school, the world crept in and the old time isolation was no longer possible.

### Contributions

Ever since the days of John F. Funk (1835-1930), who took a very active part in a relief project of his day, namely, by helping Mennonites of 1874-80 who settled in the prairie states and provinces, this concern for brethren in need has grown steadily among the Old Mennonites. They took an active part in the relief work of the Mennonite Central Committee since its founding in 1920 and in the Civilian Public Service program of World War II. Evangelistic fervor brought to the group by John S. Coffman (1848-1899) spread so that today the Old Mennonites have the largest home and foreign mission programs among the Mennonites. The Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities which was first organized in 1897 is controlling numerous mission projects abroad and in this country. The first home mission was started in Chicago, 1893, and the first foreign mission field in India in 1899. Publications were first initiated in the Old Mennonite group by John F. Funk who published the *Herald of Truth* and its German counterpart at Elkhart, Indiana.

They have meanwhile been superseded by the *Gospel Herald*, *The Youth's Christian Companion*, numerous other periodical publications, and Sunday school and vacation Bible school material. These periodicals and many books pertaining to the Mennonites and Christian life in general are being published in the well equipped plant of the Mennonite Publishing House at Scottsdale, Pennsylvania. The educational efforts, started with the Elkhart Institute in 1894, are now supervised by the Board of Education, and schools like Goshen College, Hesston College, and Eastern Mennonite College are training their youth. The Mennonite Historical Society and the Mennonite Research Foundation, both at Goshen, Indiana, furnish historical research for the conference. Generally speaking, the present Old Mennonite position combines a neat balance between a theological and cultural conservatism and an aggressive evangelistic zeal carrying out well supported programs of activities.



# XIII

## RUSSO-GERMAN GROUPS

### COMING TO THE PRAIRIE STATES AND PROVINCES

(1874-1884)

The Russian background of the immigration of the German-Russian Mennonites\* to America during the seventies of the past century has been described in a preceding chapter; and only the American side of the movement need be told here. As already noted, after considering various possibilities in South America, Africa and eastern Siberia as a possible asylum for such as had decided to leave Russia, North America, though with some misgivings, was finally agreed upon as affording the best prospects for their future home. As early as 1872 and '73 several small parties had arrived here on tours of inspection or to remain permanently. Among these first comers were young Bernhard Warkentin, who later became a prosperous business man in Newton, Kansas; Cornelius Jansen, former Prussian consul at Berdiansk, who, because of his interest in the immigration movement, was given seven days by the Russian government to leave the country; and David Goerz, a young school teacher,

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\* These Mennonites from Russia of course were not Russian Slavs, but Germans culturally, and Dutch for the most part originally. But the term Russian shall be used here and throughout this book wherever reference is made to them. Dutch-German-Russian would be too cumbersome a title. They were Dutch racially; German, culturally; and Russian, nationally.

who for a time found employment in the parochial school at Summerfield, Illinois, but later also a prominent leader among his people. These three men, together with others who came later took a leading part in everything that affected the welfare of their fellow immigrants, and especially in directing them to their new homes on the western prairies.

### Earliest Arrivals

Although the great exodus from the large colonies did not begin before 1874, several additional small groups had arrived even before the official delegates had



Bernhard Warkentin

reached home to report on their tour of inspection. From the files of the *Herald of Truth* we learn that by January 1874, there were ten or twelve families near Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and several more in Marion and McPherson counties, Kansas, which soon became one of the centers of large settlements. In the same issue it was announced that one thousand families were to start for America in April. By May the stream had begun. The

issue of the *Herald* for May 5, announced the arrival of fifty-eight Mennonites from Poland. By May 20, fifty more Poles (Volhynians) had arrived and located at Yankton, S. Dakota. The June issue reported that forty more had been brought by William Ewert, the Prussian Mennonite delegate, to Summerfield, Illinois, from which place they soon found their way to new homes in Kansas. On July 8, seven more families stopped at Summerfield enroute to Kansas.

### **Lending a Helping Hand**

In the meantime the different branches of the American Mennonites were busy organizing emergency committees to provide for the temporary needs of the new arrivals, and to help them to their new western homes. Some of the immigrants were rich, others well-to-do, but the large majority were poor and some extremely so. Many of these had to be provided with means to begin their life on the raw prairies and had to be temporarily supported.

In 1873, the Western District Conference largely through the influence of Christian Krehbiel of Summerfield had appointed a committee to collect money for such of the immigrants as might need help, and to direct them to their new settlements. About the same time John F. Funk of Elkhart, Indiana, secured a similar organization among the Old Mennonites of the middle west. These two organizations were soon consolidated into the *Mennonite Board of Guardians*, with Christian Krehbiel as president; David Goerz, as secretary; John F. Funk, treasurer; and Bernhard Warkentin, agent. The Mennonites of eastern Pennsylvania organized a special committee, as did also the Canadian church under the leadership of J. Y. Schantz of Berlin, Ontario. These

organizations all did valuable service in providing for the needs and conveniences of the immigrants while they were becoming settled. It is estimated that about \$100,000 was collected and spent for this work, some of which was tendered as a loan and later repaid. In addition to this sum there were many individual loans, and in Manitoba the Canadian Government advanced a loan of approximately \$100,000 at six per cent, to prospective settlers upon security furnished by Ontario Mennonites, all of which in due time was paid back.

Railroad companies and state immigration departments that had vast stretches of unoccupied lands still awaiting settlement took a lively interest in the coming of thousands of industrious European farmers. The Canadian Government passed an Order in Council offering each settler of twenty-one years of age and over a free homestead of one hundred and sixty acres, with an option on another three-quarters of a section at one dollar per acre in the province of Manitoba. To the Mennonites full religious rights were granted with exclusive control over their schools, and entire military exemption. Some twenty-six townships of land were finally reserved for the exclusive use of the Mennonites.

In Kansas, the Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railroad Company, aided by the state immigration department, secured the passage of a similar law exempting the future colonists from the state militia service. A similar concession was also made later by the state legislatures of Nebraska and Minnesota, in an attempt to attract some of the immigrants to their cheap lands. Vast stretches of railroad land were offered at from \$2.50 to \$5.00 per acre. So active was the Santa Fe company in directing the immigrants to Kansas that they sent their agent, C. B. Schmidt, to the Russian colonies for the purpose of presenting early the claims of the Sunflower State. The

company even chartered a Red Star ocean steamer which was sent to the Black Sea for a shipload of Mennonite household goods and farm implements. These goods were brought to New York, and thence by rail to Kansas all free of charge to the colonists. Influential men among the immigrants and members of the various committees were granted passes over the road. Groups of immigrants as they arrived at the Atlantic ports were carried west in special trains. The Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company was equally active in Nebraska, but the Santa Fe secured the largest number of settlers for Kansas.

### **They Come in Large Numbers**

Aided and directed by these various organizations, the immigrants continued to find their way to the western settlements by the hundreds throughout the summer and autumn of 1874. The *Herald* reports that on July 18, eighty families had reached Burlington, Iowa, enroute to Nebraska. The next day, thirty arrived from the Crimea under the leadership of their elder, Jacob Wiebe, at Elkhart, Indiana, where they remained for the night in the Mennonite meetinghouse at that place, and the next day left — some for Kansas, and others for Yankton, Dakota. The total number of arrivals at the harbor of New York by July 8, was six hundred. At the same time too, many had arrived at Toronto, Canada, on their way to Manitoba. On July 20, three hundred and seventy are reported, and on July 30, two hundred and ninety more. The next day five hundred and four left for Manitoba. And thus the steady stream continued throughout all the summer and fall. An account given in November, 1874, shows that the Mennonite Board of Guardians reported from the Inman Line the arrival of two hundred families. The Pennsylvania Aid Committee reported thirty-five fam-



ilies on the Hamburg Line. The Canadian committee reported the arrival of two hundred and thirty by way of the Allan Line for the year. The total estimate for all the settlements for the year was about twelve hundred families, with the prospect that another thousand families would follow in 1875. And the latter year was largely a repetition of the first. Whole vessels were chartered by the immigrants. In December, 1874, seven hundred had arrived on the *Vaderland*, and four hundred on the *Abbotsford*. On July 25, 1875, the *Nederland* steamed up to the dock at New York with five hundred and fifty Mennonites on board, and soon after the *Nevada* unloaded five hundred and seventy.

By the fall of 1875, the greatest rush was over, but small bands of Mennonites continued to come up to 1880 and several even later. By August, 1879, the *Herald* estimates that in Manitoba alone there were seven thousand three hundred and eighty-three Mennonites. The number in the United States—Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota and Minnesota was somewhat larger. The exact number of arrivals during this period is somewhat conjectural, since no accurate statistics were kept by any one so far as known. But from a rather careful count of the lists as they appeared in the Mennonite papers of the day it would seem that the total number of Mennonite immigrants from Russia to America during the ten-year period following 1874 was about eighteen thousand—ten thousand to the United States, and eight thousand to Manitoba.

As already indicated these colonists came in various groups, separated in Russia by geographical or doctrinal differences. Those from the Old or *Chortitza* Colony,\* and the entire *Bergthal* church, and a number from the *Fürstenland*, two daughter colonies of *Chortitza*, located

\* *Old Colony* since this was the oldest Mennonite colony in Russia.

in Manitoba. The *Molotschna* furnished the settlers in Kansas, Nebraska and other western states. The *Volhynians* went to Dakota and Kansas. The *Hutterites* located in Dakota. Scattered members from all the Russian colonies were found throughout all of the United States settlements. Besides these geographical groups, which differed more or less from one another, there were the different church divisions imported from Russia, to which were added several which developed in America. Among those imported were the *Brüder Gemeinde*, *Krimmer Brüder*, the *Kleine Gemeinde*, and a small division unnamed in Russia but known at first in America as the *Isaac Peters Gemeinde*. Usually the immigrants came in compact groups or sometimes as whole congregations led by faithful elders and devoted laymen. Among these leaders may be mentioned Elder Jacob Buller, and school teacher Heinrich Richert of the *Alexanderwohl* congregation; Dietrich Gaeddert of *Hoffnungsaus*, a subdivision of *Alexanderwohl*; Johann Wiebe of the *Old Colonists* in Manitoba; Gerhard Wiebe of the *Bergthaler*; Jacob Wiebe of the *Krimmer Brethren*; Abraham Schellenberg, somewhat belated, of the *Mennonite Brethren*; Leonhard Sudermann from *Berdiansk*; Wilhelm Ewert with the *Prussian* contingent; Andreas Schrag, a layman, and Elder Jacob Stucky with the *Swiss Volhynian* group; and Elder Tobias Unruh with the poverty-stricken *Cantoners*, also from Volhynia; Paul and Lorenz Tschetter of the *Hutterite* group; and a number of others.

## MANITOBA

The most conservative groups—those from *Chortitza*, and her two daughter colonies, *Bergthal* and *Fürstenland*, together with the *Kleine Gemeinde* contingent—chose Manitoba as their home, largely because here they were definitely promised military exemption and large

compact areas of land where they might establish their closed colonies as they had them in Russia, thus maintaining their distinctive way of life without any outside interference, with their own schools, their distinct German language, and a large degree of local self-government. As already noted, they were granted two land reserves, the East and West, to which was added another somewhat later along the Scratching River—totalling all told twenty-seven townships on both sides of the Red River south of Winnipeg.

Here they tried to reproduce again on the raw prairies of Manitoba the whole social and economic order as far as possible as they had it on the steppes of Russia, including their farm villages. They formed themselves into groups of from fifteen to thirty homesteads, with their houses built well back from a long, wide street which in course of time became lined with poplar and other fast-growing shade trees. Each village was given a distinct name, frequently in memory of the Russian homes they had left—*Chortitza*, *Bergthal*, *Schönwiese*, *Rosenort*, etc. *Schanzenfeld* honored one of their benefactors.

Each village, too, became practically a self-sufficient economic and civil unit with its school and shop; and in connection with other villages, a church congregation. Each had its own local magistrate (*Schulze*), and together with others in the colony was ruled over by a superintendent (*Oberschulze*), who directed the secular affairs of the entire colony; while the elder, assisted by a number of untrained and unpaid ministers, had charge of spiritual matters as well as a considerable voice occasionally in matters purely temporal. Each farmer had a deed to his own tract of land, but for purposes of cultivation the whole land area was often divided and distributed among the farmers in long and equal convenient strips without reference to ownership.

This type of farm life was gradually abandoned in the course of time. With the trek of the Old Colonists to Mexico recently it finally disappeared almost entirely, although many of the former villages remain; and some, like Steinbach in the East Reserve, have since developed into important centers of agricultural and industrial life. Thriving towns like Altona, Winkler and Plum Coulee have also grown up on the outskirts and along the railroads of the West Reserve.

These first settlers along the Red endured all the hardships of pioneer life. At this time there wasn't a single mile of railroad in the entire province. They had no white neighbors for miles around. Winnipeg, the nearest town, had only a few hundred inhabitants, and had just graduated from a frontier fort—Fort Garry. The total population of Manitoba was not above several thousand, most of whom were half-breeds with a smaller number of pure Indians along the western fringe. This Mennonite settlement was the first attempt at mass colonization on the raw prairies south of Winnipeg, and as such attracted considerable attention on the part of the Canadian authorities.

Living conditions were hard for the first few years. The virgin sod had never felt the ploughshare; building material was far away; the winters were long and cold; fuel was scarce; household conveniences were lacking; prairie life was lonely. To make matters worse, on top of all these hardships for several years the anxious settlers had to see their scanty harvests threatened by an unusual grasshopper plague. Most of the colonists were poor and had to be helped by a loan from the Canadian Government, guaranteed by their Ontario Old Mennonite brethren. A local homesick rhymester, longing for the comforts he left behind bemoans his fate with these words:

*Mit Tränen seh ich an die Stätte,  
Die ich zum Wohnsitz mir erwählte,  
Kein Haus, kein Herd, kein Stuhl, kein Bette,  
Kein Pferd, kein Vieh, kein Fleisch, kein Mehl,  
Kein Schüssel, Löffel, alles fehlt,  
Wie los bin ich auf dieser Welt.*

They had courage though, and hope, and pluck. Gradually these hardships were overcome, and the raw prairies were turned into vast fields of golden grain and into pastures filled with fine herds of sleek cattle. Their colonies became the proud show-places for travellers and visiting public officials from the East. As early as 1877 Lord Dufferin, then Governor General of Canada, included a visit through the East Reserve in his tour of inspection through Manitoba. In a farewell reception tendered him by the city of Winnipeg as he left for Ottawa, he spoke of this visit in most glowing and somewhat exaggerated terms. Among other fine things he said:

Although I have witnessed many sights to give me pleasure during my various progresses through the Dominion, seldom have I beheld any spectacle more pregnant with prophecy, more fraught with promise of an astonishing future than the Mennonite settlement. (Great applause). When I visited these interesting people they had been only two years in the Province, and yet in a long ride I took across the prairies which but yesterday was absolutely bare, desolate and untenanted, and the home of the wolf, badger and the eagle, I passed village after village, homestead after homestead, furnished with all the conveniences and incidents of European comfort and a scientific agriculture; while on the other side of the road were cornfields already ripe for harvest, and pastures populous with herds of cattle stretching away to the horizon. (Great cheering). Even on this continent, the peculiar theatre of rapid change and progress, there has nowhere, I imagine, taken place so marvelous a transformation. (renewed cheering).

### Daughter Colonies

As the Manitoba settlement outgrew its original



allotments, and as the provinces farther west opened up for colonization, the surplus population followed the general trend toward the setting sun. In the early nineties of the past century large colonies from all the Manitoba settlements located in Saskatchewan; and in the early years of the present century smaller groups moved into Alberta, and a small number into British Columbia. After World War I, too, most of the Hutterites, leaving their Dakota homes because of their war experiences, established themselves in western Canada. Mennonites seldom moved into new communities as isolated settlers, but always as large groups into an area of cheap lands where they could organize themselves into a compact church congregation. Of course in later years after all the cheap lands had been taken up this was no longer easy. In the middle twenties of the present century the large groups of new immigrants from Russia scattered themselves throughout the cities and farm communities of western Canada wherever homes were available. But this later story is told in a succeeding chapter.

## Culture

Religiously and culturally the Manitoba Mennonites lagged somewhat behind their achievements in the field of material progress. Though all were ultraconservative, some were more so than others, the most extreme being the *Old Colonists* on the West Reserve and related groups. All were determined to preserve the German language exclusively, their own schools, their village life, and all the other traditional customs and practices without the slightest change. In the early nineties when a small group of such of the *Bergthaler* as had moved from the East Reserve to the West had demanded a more progressive school system than that prevailing, they were denied fellowship with the remaining majority, which came to be

known as the *Sommerfelder*. The *Bergthaler* of the West Reserve and other small groups, still more progressive, under the leadership of Johann Funk, organized themselves into a Canadian Conference of their own; many of them also affiliating with the General Conference Mennonite Church.

The religious practises prevailing among the Old Colonists at the time of their Mexican exodus were typical of most of the groups at the time of the first settlement. They worshipped in meetinghouses that were severely plain and unpainted. The hard seats without backs, added nothing to the comfort of listening to long sermons read from a book of manuscripts, in a monotonous sleep-inducing, singsong tone. The preacher never looked at his audience. The merest suggestion of a raised eyelid, the least gesture with his hands, or the shrug of the shoulders, the slightest departure in any respect from the practises of the fathers would have been met not only with astonishment but instant disapproval on the part of such of the congregation as were sufficiently awake to notice the innovation. In dress the laity as well as the preachers had to conform to long-established conventionalities. White collars, bearded chins, and such vanities as shining watch chains and their like were strictly forbidden. To be in good standing and a proper example to his flock the Old Colony preacher should appear in the pulpit in the old-fashioned sailor trousers tucked in high-topped boots. Women likewise were to be garbed in conventional dress-aprons and shawls, somber clothes cut after uniform and prescribed patterns.

The language of the pulpit was German; that of everyday conversation, some form of *Plattdeutsch*, imported from Prussia to Russia more than a century before. Prayer was offered in silence, the worshippers kneeling.

In their singing they used an old hymn book also imported from their Prussian ancestral homes; and were led by a *Vorsänger*. The hymns were without notes, and the melodies to which they were sung had undergone wonderful transformations as they had come down through the generations. Since the singing of different parts was regarded as a worldly innovation, all sang in unison.

Of religious affiliation with other Mennonite bodies of course there was none whatever. Participation in the civil and political life that centered in the towns on the outskirts of the settlement was unknown. Church members were even forbidden to take up their residence in these towns, much less engage in business. All such religious and social affiliation was regarded as being unequally yoked with the world, and hence to be strictly avoided. Public schools, too, as we saw were tabooed, and the German language insisted upon as a means of instruction. All these regulations were enforced by a strict application of the ban, to which was added the practise of *avoidance*. Civil office, modern clothing, modern houses, the English language, Sunday schools, public schools, higher schools of any sort, prayer meetings, salaried ministers, telephones, automobiles (hell-wagons), and numerous other institutions which are usually regarded as symptoms of progress—all these were considered as of the "world," and to be given a wide berth by the true Christian.

Such were still the Old Colonists at the time of their trek to Mexico in the early twenties of the present century. Deluded and foolish they were, so we say according to our modern notions; but they were nevertheless an honest, devout and sincere people, sturdy of character, and in many respects useful and worthy citizens; no more addicted to religious formality than were our boasted Puritan forefathers at the time of their search for a haven

of refuge and the same religious liberty some centuries ago.

Of course the above description does not fit the large majority of the more progressive Russian Mennonites found today all through Canada.

The Russian Mennonites especially were greatly concerned about the education of their children. The first building to be erected in their pioneer settlements after they had established their homes was the school house. And since the chief objectives of their educational program was the preservation of their fathers' religion and the German language, they were greatly concerned that they retain complete control of their schools. Naturally such schools with these limited objectives were not of a high order. Perhaps as high as many others, however. At first the provincial government furnished but little supervision. The first schools thus in both Reserves were private schools. It was only gradually that these were changed into public schools, supported by public taxation, and brought under government supervision, which improved their character somewhat. Poorly equipped teachers at first taught exclusively in German. The curriculum was meager. Finally the English language was introduced with the German—the provincial government permitting both languages as a means of instruction until the close of World War I. During the last decade of the past century and the first of this, H. H. Ewert, the former pioneer educator among his people in Kansas, performed valuable service in raising the educational standard among the Manitoba Mennonites. Amid great discouragements and with many sacrifices he spent a good part of his life in behalf of the educational interest of his people. For twelve years, 1893 to 1905, he occupied the position of government inspector of Mennonite schools, during which time he increased the public schools from a bare half

dozen to some forty. He was also one of the leading spirits in the founding of the Gretna Normal School for the training of teachers in both the private and public schools, of which there were over one hundred at the close of the war. Under the liberal bilingual law permitting both languages to be used, considerable progress



Alexanderwohl Immigration House, Goessel, Kansas, 1874

was made, and the use of English was becoming more and more common. David Toews, former head of the Rosthern Academy, has performed the same kind of service for the Mennonite schools of Saskatchewan in more recent years as that of Ewert in Manitoba.



## School Trouble

Such was the school situation among the Canadian Mennonites up to the close of World War I. The strong spirit of nationalism engendered by the war brought about a radical change in the liberal educational policy which the western provinces had followed up to this time relative to all their foreign populations whether German, French or Slavic. But now in both Manitoba and Saskatchewan laws were passed forbidding the use of any other language than English in either private or public schools. These laws with their drastic elimination of German as a means of instruction among the Mennonites who for fifty years in Canada had known no other tongue in their religious worship and social intercourse, spread consternation among them and called forth a determined opposition not only from the conservatives but also from the progressives who had been most favorable to the extension of the public school system. Some of these latter now favored changing their public schools back into private institutions in the belief that the law would not be so strictly enforced in the private as in the public system. For several years the governments followed a watchful waiting policy, and the laws were not rigorously enforced. Among the progressive groups who had already adopted the English language as the principal medium of instruction, German was still retained as a subject of study for an hour or so each day. So long as the schools measured up to the required standards of instruction, and the English was well taught, the inspectors did not inquire too closely into the small amount of German that was still retained. The Old Colonists, too, who refused all English were given a breathing spell to adapt themselves to the new conditions, and make up their minds as to their future course.

But the coming of the Hutterites from the Dakotas

into Canada in 1918 brought the matter to a head. Although not Mennonites, yet the Hutterites were so classed by the Canadians. And the coming of more Mennonites just now when feeling was already strong against them because of their special exemption from military service and their German extraction, brought to the surface all the latent opposition to their privileged status which had been gathering all through the war. Largely through the organized efforts of ex-service men, and the public press, drastic measures were passed by the Dominion Government forbidding further immigration of Mennonites into Canada, and by the provincial authorities forbidding the use of German in the schools. Most of the Mennonite groups after several years of petitioning to the legislatures, and vain appealing to the courts, finally bowed to the inevitable and conformed to the provincial laws. The Old Colonists, however, in both provinces, to whom the German school seemed an integral part of their religious system, preferred persecution to what they believed would seriously threaten the maintenance of their religious faith, and to what they interpreted as an infringement of their religious liberty as well as a violation of the promises of 1873.

They stubbornly resisted all the efforts of the school authorities to establish public schools among them, and to compel their children to attend them. In Saskatchewan the government finally erected public buildings, or confiscated private ones, levied taxes among the unwilling patrons to pay for them; appointed outside trustees over the schools; sent in outside English teachers; and then awaited results. Nothing happened. Few children came. Then to enforce attendance the courts fined and jailed the parents. A news item from Hague appearing in the *Steinbach Post* on March 31, 1921, stating that a short time before sixty Mennonites had paid a fine of one thousand

dollars and that one had just been given a thirty-day jail sentence in Prince Albert is a typical illustration of what was going on elsewhere.

In Manitoba, too, similar measures were adopted, though they were not so drastically enforced. Public schools with exclusive English instruction were everywhere established under the control of provincial trustees. The Old Colonists here, too, refused to send their children; and a number of parents among other groups did so under compulsion. English teachers hired by these trustees drew a year's salary without teaching a single day. Parents were fined. But none of these measures succeeded in gaining the desired end. The Old Colonists could not become reconciled to the loss of their school privileges. Nothing seemed left now for them but another trek to a new land of freedom where the need of new settlers and the absence of anti-German feeling might guarantee them the liberties which they had so generously enjoyed in Canada since 1873. As early as 1919 there was talk of leaving Canada. During the next two years delegations were sent to various South American countries, Mexico, and several of our own southern states. Strange as it may seem they were everywhere promised their demands, even in Mississippi and Florida—religious liberty, complete control over their schools, with permission to use the language of their choice. They finally determined upon Mexico; and in 1922 began an emigration which resulted in the loss to Canada of some five thousand Old Colonists, somewhat queer in their religious demands, but yet among Canada's best farmers and most peaceable citizens. The fine homesteads which the Old Colonists sold at a sacrifice both in Manitoba, and Saskatchewan, have in some cases been taken over by the newer Russian immigrants who on the contrary are not only eager to learn English but have contributed greatly to the educa-

tional progress of the Canadian Mennonites as a whole.

Several years later about two thousand *Sommerfelder* and *Bergthaler* from both Manitoba and Saskatchewan migrated to Paraguay for similar reasons.

### Recent Developments.

Those Mennonites of 1874 who remained in the West and East Reserve are progressively adjusting themselves to the Canadian environment and have again become pioneers in various areas of agriculture. During the depression years after World War I, Altona, Manitoba, in the West Reserve, became a leader in the co-operative movement, founding the Rheinland Agricultural Institute, and by establishing the Co-operative Vegetable Oils, Limited, introduced a new industry—growing sunflowers and processing sunflower seed oil. In 1948 some 28,000 acres were seeded to sunflowers in southern Manitoba, yielding 23,000,000 pounds of seed which were all processed in the Vegetable Oils plant. Throughout the Mennonite communities numerous co-operative and mutual aid organizations can be found. The Mennonites have become the most co-operative minded citizens of Manitoba.

### WESTERN UNITED STATES

The settlements this side of the international boundary also were located along the western frontier line through Minnesota, Dakota, Nebraska, and Kansas. Most of the Mennonites here came from the less conservative Molotschna colony and other scattered Russian communities. Like their Manitoba brethren they, too, asked for land reservations large enough to form compact and closed Mennonite communities. This demand was debated in the United States Senate for several weeks, during which Senator Pratt of Indiana, speaking of the native Mennonites in his state said, "There is no worthier

class of people upon the face of the globe"; and Senator Cameron of Pennsylvania in behalf of his own state added "They are among our best citizens." But to no avail the bill embodying these demands did not pass. The Homestead Act did not permit the granting or reserving the public domain in areas larger than one hundred and sixty acres to any one person; and the railroad companies owned only every alternate section along their right of way. Except in a few cases, therefore, no attempt was made to reproduce the Russian village type of life in our own west. Virgin land was bought by the settlers from the railroad companies, or from former homesteaders, who for a few dollars profit were glad to pull up stakes and move farther west. Some of the poorer immigrants took up Congress land. All the settlements, however, in course of time developed into rather compact communities.

## Kansas

Over half of the newcomers to the United States located in the state of Kansas along the then frontier line through the central part of the state in Harvey, McPherson and Reno counties, north of Wichita, on lands owned by the Santa Fe Railroad Company, largely no doubt due to the activities of that company and especially of its German colonization agent, C. B. Schmidt. The Santa Fe aided the settlers in every possible way, sold them cheap land, gave them reduced freight rates, and built immigration barracks to house them temporarily while they were selecting their prospective homes and erecting their first crude living quarters.

Most of the settlements consisted of selected groups or congregations that had lived together in Russia. One of the largest of these was the *Alexanderwohl* congregation consisting of about six hundred souls, which came as a solid organization, with an unbroken history from



Russia, through Prussia to Holland in the sixteenth century. Arriving on the raw prairies late in the fall of 1874, sixty-five heads of families in this group engaged an outfit of carpenters to build for them north of Newton as many small one story houses, twenty by forty feet in size, before the winter snows fell.

In the meantime, other groups were spreading across the surrounding prairies. The Krimmer Brethren, some thirty families, formed the village, *Gnadenau*. The Swiss Volhynians, under the leadership of Elder Jacob Stucky, located a bit farther north in McPherson county. Tobias Unruh and his party from old Poland selected the region about *Canton*.

*Halstead*, a little hamlet along the Santa Fe in Harvey county, named after a well-known journalist of the day, the nucleus of a settlement made by a group of Palatines from Summerfield, Illinois, became the cultural and administrative center of the whole Kansas emigration movement for a time. Here lived Bernhard Warkentin, who established a prosperous milling business, and introduced from Russia the well-known hard red winter wheat, now known all over the west; David Goerz, directing head of many of the early Mennonite enterprises, and editor of *Zur Heimat*, a weekly devoted to the interests of the Russian Mennonites of both Russia and America, a paper quite cosmopolitan in character, not at all like the ordinary run of country weeklies published in a village of two hundred, carrying in its advertising pages more notices of ship and railroad companies with dates of sailing than the great New York dailies; and Christian Krehbiel of Summerfield, founder of an Indian school, and president of the Mennonite Board of Guardians. Halstead also became the seat of the first school of higher learning among the western Mennonites—Halstead Seminary.

## Other States

Other western states, too, got a smaller share of the new settlers. Cornelius Jansen joined a group of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Jefferson county, Nebraska, where he purchased several sections of land from the Burlington and Missouri Railroad Company, and later the town of *Jansen* was named in his honor; the first town in Nebraska, so it is said, to have written into every deed for a lot the stipulation that no saloon could be established on the premises. Several congregations were also established in York and Hamilton counties. The colony near Beatrice was of Prussian origin.

In Minnesota the beautiful rich region about *Mountain Lake* in the southwestern part of the state became the center of a number of substantial Mennonite congregations.

The Hutterites and some of the Swiss Volhynians located in the southeastern part of what was then the territory of Dakota, not far from Yankton.

These foreigners with their strange customs and foreign clothes, coming in large groups, often aroused a good deal of interest in the small frontier towns when they first arrived. In the fall of 1874 the Santa Fe company was obliged to find temporary quarters for a few weeks in their railroad shops at Topeka for several hundred families enroute to their homes on the prairies. Here the newcomers were visited by large and curious crowds of Topeka citizens who sometimes regarded their future possibilities with some misgivings. Speaking of the appearance of the men of the party the Topeka *Commonwealth* observes:

The men appear to have conscientious scruples against wearing clothes that fit them, the idea appearing to be to get all the cloth you can for the money. The men's vests therefore descend toward the knees, and their pants possess

an alarming amount of slack. Their favorite headgear is a flat cloth cap which they pull off in saluting any person. This habit they will soon drop now that they have arrived in Kansas where "nobody respects nothing."

But when these strange Mennonites began to spend large sums of money freely in the Topeka stores for farm utensils and household necessities for their western homes idle curiosity turned to admiration, and the *Commonwealth* forgot all about the "alarming amount of the slack in their pants," and thought instead only of their future economic worth to Topekans. "These people" the *Commonwealth* now says,—

are making extensive purchases from our neighbors, creating quite a demand for articles necessary to opening homes. This is creating quite a trade which, considering the dull times, is very acceptable to our merchants. The people will be large buyers for some time to come, and the acquaintances formed by their temporary location here will give our merchants a strong hold on their trade which it only needs their exercise to retain.

It was for the purpose, no doubt, of cultivating this good feeling that the merchants and public officials of Topeka planned a public reception, and a procession through the city which all the citizens were urged to join. The reason for this public recognition of the Mennonites in Topeka, according to promoters of the plan was to show "our friends from Russia that we recognize and appreciate their presence among us and are anxious to cultivate neighborly relations with them."

Not all the Mennonite immigrants were as well supplied with means to buy utensils and implements for their farms. Many were poor and needed all the help so generously granted them by the relief societies of the American Mennonites. Among the poorest was the Polish contingent under Tobias Unruh which landed almost unannounced in Florence, Kansas, one cold winter morning

with the thermometer twelve below zero, lacking food, shelter, clothing and the means with which they might supply themselves with these elemental necessities. This emergency taxed the ingenuity of the Mennonite Board of Guardians almost to the limit. The Board after an emergency session immediately supplied the new arrivals with temporary winter quarters in the surrounding towns; and the next spring helped them each to a forty-acre farm with a limited amount of equipment, all with money lent them by eastern Mennonites.

### **Transplanting a Bit of Russia**

The Mennonites of our own west also tried to transplant as much as possible of their Russian way of life to their new homes. Villages proved to be impracticable; and were soon abandoned. But the German language, the parochial school, interest in the mission cause, their own hospitals, children's homes, and fire insurance companies, all these were encouraged as they had been in their old home. Favorite articles of diet, too, were continued—watermelons, sorghum, sunflower seed, cucumbers, various fruits, *Borscht*, *Zwieback*, etc. Occasionally they attempted to adapt some of their German farm utensils to American conditions. The Manitobans early ordered from Russia a supply of their farm wagons, but when it was found that the narrow gauge of the foreign vehicle would not fit the wider track of the American wagon the order was not repeated. In Kansas several farmers manufactured for their fellow Mennonites a number of their familiar threshing stones, but here, too, the American power thresher soon rendered this primitive method of threshing obsolete.

Wheat growing of course was as well adapted to the American western prairies as to Russian steppes, and flour milling became an important industry in all the

Russian Mennonite communities. It was the Mennonites, as already noted, who first introduced from Russia the variety of hard wheat now almost universally sown by the western farmers. For a time the Mennonites about Peabody, Kansas tried to introduce silk culture. After a rather unsuccessful experiment for several years, however, the attempt had to be given up, but not until after a silk dress made of home-grown cocoons had been presented to the wife of the Kansas governor. The only evidence left today of this early attempt to introduce a new industry into sunny Kansas where the climatic con-



Warkentin Flour Mill, Halstead, Kansas

ditions seemed especially well adapted for the experiment are the long rows of mulberry trees still found on Mennonite farms.

But there was one Russian institution that was well adapted to the needs of the American prairies with its lack of wood and coal; and which elicited nothing but the highest praise from the natives—the big straw-burning Russian brick oven and stove. This oven was so built into the walls of the three main rooms of the typical Mennonite home as to heat the entire house and at the same time serve for cooking. The big fireplace was fed with straw for an hour or so each morning and the brick retaining the heat, kept the building warm for the remainder



of the day. On the prairies where fuel was non-existent this straw-burning heater was far superior to the native stove which burned only corncobs or buffalo chips. The Manitoban Mennonites made an excellent fuel from rotten straw and manure in the form of sun-dried brick, a fuel still to be found today in a few of the homesteads of the Old Colonists.

## CULTURAL GROUPS AND CONFERENCES

With the exception of the *Krimmer Brethren*, the *Kleine Gemeinde*, and a few scattered members of the *Mennonite Brethren* church, and one or two other independent bodies, all these groups early united their forces in promoting their common religious and educational interests. Schools and missions were the chief cultural concern for a time, and it was for the purpose of advancing their common school cause that they met in 1877 to organize what became known as the *Kansas Conference*. Active and leading in these efforts were the Bavarians at Halstead, and the Prussians near Newton. When the Prussian congregation at Beatrice, Nebraska, joined them some years later the name was changed to the *Western District Conference*. Daughter colonies from Oklahoma and other nearby states have since joined this conference.

The Dakota and Minnesota groups later organized themselves for similar purposes into the *Northern District Conference*. Still later as states farther west were settled by Mennonites from these older colonies the *Pacific Coast Conference* was founded. In course of years, too, these various conferences assimilated the Prussian, Swiss and Galician congregations which grew up in the meantime in these regions. Practically all the congregations included in these three district organizations now

also hold membership in the *General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America*.

At the time of the immigration both the Old Mennonites in America and the General Conference were generous in their support of the new arrivals with money and other forms of service; and both invited them into membership in their bodies. The Old Mennonites, however, because of their conservative dress regulations and other practises were more hesitant to assimilate the new arrivals, than were the General Conference Mennonites. The latter, too, at the time were more sympathetic to the cause of foreign missions than the former, a cause of considerable interest among the Russians even before their migration. The different congregations joined the General Conference independently and at different times. The Alexanderwohl Church was first, in 1876; the Dakota Swiss followed in 1881; Minnesota sent her first delegates in 1890; and Nebraska, in 1893. Each succeeding conference session found new additions. Isaac Peters in Nebraska and Aaron Wall in Minnesota with their congregations remained outside.

### **Kleine Gemeinde**

A group from the *Kleine Gemeinde*, it will be remembered, were the first of the Russian immigrants to arrive in Manitoba in 1874. They located on the East Reserve, but, finding the land in that region unsatisfactory, a number of them moved west of the Red along Scratching River, near the present town of Morris. In the same year another group of the same party, influenced largely by Cornelius Jansen, left their fellows at Buffalo and established the Jansen community in Nebraska.

In Manitoba the *Kleine Gemeinde* has suffered some losses of members to the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, and other groups, because of the conservative at-

titude of this church toward newer methods of promoting the Christian cause. However, in recent years the more progressive element of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Canada has been active in young people's work, secondary education, and mission work. In 1948-49 several hundred of the more conservative element moved to Mexico and settled adjacent to the other Manitoba Mennonites who had settled there a generation ago. The *Kleine Gemeinde* of Jansen, Nebraska, lost many members to other Mennonite groups. The remainder moved to Meade, Kansas. In recent years an Evangelical Mennonite Brethren church was organized here and the remnant of the *Kleine Gemeinde* has reorganized and is no longer affiliated with the *Kleine Gemeinde*. The total number of the *Kleine Gemeinde* in Canada and Mexico is about two thousand. Their church organ is the *Christlicher Familienfreund*. German is still the predominant language.

### Krimmer Brethren

The *Krimmer Brethren* are quite similar to the Mennonite Brethren in their religious practises, both being immersionist and fervent'y evangelistic in their worship. Most of their diversions in the early days on the raw prairies took a decidedly religious turn. On Sunday they held meetings morning, noon, and night, with prayer meetings during the week in the homes. Revivals were frequent, fervid and well attended.

They were strict disciplinarians of both the conduct and appearance of their members. The sale of tobacco and liquor was prohibited in their village at a time when a free use of both was not regarded as a major sin by most of the other Russian Mennonite groups. Young people were carefully chaperoned by their elders in all their gatherings both social and religious. Sunday schools

were held in the afternoon so as to minimize the possibility of desecrating the Sabbath by any less worthy activities. Marriage outside the church even with another branch of the denomination was strictly prohibited. Dress regulations likewise were strict. Like other groups, they discouraged worldliness in superfluous dress, excessive buying of land, attendance at theatres and circuses, carrying guns, hail insurance, and voting.

The Krimmer Mennonite Brethren have been pioneers among the more conservative Mennonites of America in evangelistic work, city missions, and other home missionary activities. For years they had their own academy at Inman, Kansas. In their higher educational efforts they are sharing Tabor College with the Mennonite Brethren. Their membership as of 1948 was about two thousand. The *Christian Witness* is their official periodical.

### **Mennonite Brethren**

Small scattered bands and individuals here and there of the *Mennonite Brethren* group were found in most of the first settlements of the Russian Mennonites in the United States. Although these groups occasionally found one another and held religious worship in the homes, in general there was little of organized church activity among them. With the coming of Elder Abraham Schellenberg, however, in 1879 the church was organized, and more aggressive work began in the interests of church extension. Scattered members were gathered into congregations, revival meetings were held, and considerable numbers from other Mennonite groups joined them. By 1887 the membership had reached twelve hundred and sixty-six, scattered all through the various Mennonite communities.

Conferences, held annually and well attended by

both laymen and ministers, play an important role in the religious life of the membership. In a session held in 1900 the following practises were discouraged—writing foolish articles and jokes for the newspapers; attending weddings of members with unconverted partners, and participation in law suits. Later sessions went on record against life insurance, marriage of cousins, and Fourth of July celebrations. As a substitute for the latter it was suggested that “something better” be offered the young people for that day, missionary festivals for example. The church in America is still more conservative than were their brethren in Russia before 1918, the time of the collapse of Russia, and the decline of Mennonitism in that unhappy land.

For several years, beginning in 1898, their educational interests were served by a “German Department” in McPherson College, a Dunkard and immersionist institution, which had conference support. In 1908, however, a separate school was founded, Tabor College at Hillsboro, Kansas. The chief center of the church is still Kansas and Oklahoma, with a number of congregations also in Nebraska, California, and other western states. Large additions have been made in western Canada by the coming of the recent Russian immigrants already members of this branch.

A statistical summary shows that the Mennonite Brethren had a membership on January 1, 1948, of 19,169, which was distributed almost equally in the United States and Canada; of the 149 congregations, 83 were found north of the border. The Mennonite Brethren are conducting a very active program in fields like missions, foreign and domestic, relief, education, etc. In 1948 they had 123 missionaries in foreign fields (on furlough and on duty), and 106 mission workers in home mission fields. The total contributions for all causes amounted to \$1,256,-



153, which makes an average per member of \$65.53. For foreign missions their contributions amounted to more than \$200,000, for home missions and for education nearly \$140,000 each, and for relief more than \$350,000.

### **Church of God in Christ, Mennonite**

The *Church of God in Christ, Mennonite*, it will be recalled had its origin as a small offshoot from the Old Mennonite congregation in Wayne county, Ohio, led by John Holdeman, who, in the early seventies, moved to Kansas with his family and the entire church membership. He arrived here just in time to take up the leadership of the spiritually disorganized followers of Tobias Unruh at a critical time of their existence. By extending them both material and spiritual help at the time of their greatest need, he succeeded in gaining a large following among them for his new church organization. Later a number of additions were made from the *Kleine Gemeinde* following in Manitoba. And so, this group, although of a non-Russian native American origin, yet is almost exclusively composed of descendants of these two Russian immigrant parties.

The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, adheres to traditional Mennonite non-conformity and church discipline. The group shows great evangelistic zeal and stresses conversion. In World War II their drafted young men almost without exception took the conscientious objector position. The church is wholeheartedly supporting the relief activities of the MCC and had a number of relief workers on the field after World War II. The interest in missions of this church has led to the establishment of mission churches in Mexico. The group has an aggressive program of mutual aid and after World War II established the Mercy Hospital at Moundridge, Kansas.

These descendants of the poverty-stricken Men-

nonites from Poland have become thrifty and, in some instances, prosperous farmers. The membership of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, was about four thousand in 1948, of which number a thousand live in Canada. The official church papers are the *Messenger of Truth* and *Botschafter der Wahrheit*.

### Evangelical Mennonite Brethren

The *Evangelical Mennonite Brethren* is the name of a small branch of Russian Mennonites who had their origin in two small congregations, one in Nebraska, the other in Minnesota, both led by ministers a bit more conservative and considerably more independent and individualistic than their fellows. Isaac Peters, an intelligent, though aggressive and conservative leader of the Porde-nau congregation, was exiled from Russia in 1874 because of his active participation in the emigration movement. In Nebraska he became a member of the Henderson congregation, but because he thought the majority of the membership too much addicted to what he called worldly practises, including the use of tobacco, he, together with a small group who agreed with him, withdrew from the membership of the congregation, thus starting an independent church, which for a time favored affiliation with the American Old Mennonites, though the union was never completed.

Aaron Wall was a member of the first church organized by Wilhelm Ewert in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Because he opposed the introduction of Sunday schools and other progressive measures, and like Peters, also objected to the use of tobacco among his members he, too, withdrew from his congregation. His following was known for a good many years as the *Bruderthaler*. In 1910 these two congregations, the *Bruderthaler* and that

of Peters, united their forces under the rather pretentious title of the "*Defenseless Mennonites of North America.*" For a time largely, no doubt, because of a similarity in name and partly because of similar beliefs and practises, this branch affiliated in mission work especially with the older Defenseless Mennonites of Illinois (now Evangelical Mennonite Church). They are now known as the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren. They have been especially successful in winning converts from the *Kleine Gemeinde*, establishing congregations in Jansen, Nebraska, Meade, Kansas, and Manitoba.

### The Hutterites

To these various groups of Mennonite immigrants should be added another, which, although not of direct Mennonite origin, yet have shared many of their peculiar religious experiences through the centuries, including the immigration from Russia—namely the Hutterites. These Hutterites, as already noted, being strongly non-resistant, decided to cast their lot with that of the Mennonites in the American venture. They came in three groups—nearly one hundred families all told—two groups in 1874, the one the *Bon Homme* locating west of Yankton on the Missouri; and the other, the *Wolf Creek*, on the lower James. The third group, the *Elm Spring*, arrived in 1876 and established its settlement farther up the latter river.

Here these three groups each bought several thousand acres of land in as secluded a region as possible along the river, and established a *Bruderhof* as they called their independent communities. In Europe the Hutterites had mixed agriculture with industry, but in Dakota, since there were no markets for industrial products, they confined themselves almost entirely to farming for

which they needed large land areas. They preferred to locate along a river bank because milling was always an important side line with them. Population increase among them has been rapid. The original three Households (*Bruderhof*) had increased in 1942 to more than fifty with a total population of six thousand. Of this number of Households there were five in South Dakota, fourteen in Manitoba, thirty in Alberta, one in Montana, and one in Ontario. Early expansion was up the James River, with only one *Bruderhof* of twelve families following the traditional course westward, locating in Montana. Because of their refusal to do military service and to buy liberty bonds during World War I, the Dakota Hutterites were severely mistreated by some of their superpatriotic fellow citizens. Their cattle and sheep were driven off and sold, and many of the Hutterites suffered personal indignities. As a result of this treatment most of the Households were sold, usually at a great sacrifice to the owners, and, beginning in 1918, were moved to Alberta and Manitoba.

Each *Bruderhof* is a complete, independent, almost self-sufficing economic and social unit, consisting of from fifteen to thirty families living together in a large house built dormitory-like, and substantially of stone if possible. All eat in a common dining room which is also used as an assembly room each evening for devotional services and business meetings before retiring. There is no private property, or income, or choice of occupation. The whole economic life is directed by a superintendent, generally locally known now as "boss," who is elected for good behavior by the men of the colony. He directs the work of each member, has charge of all the income, and makes all the disbursements. All earnings go into the common treasury. No one even has any spending money unless he can beg it from the boss. The main boss is assisted by a num-

ber of department heads such as the farm boss, pig boss, duck boss, cow boss, etc.

There is no idleness. Everybody works at something. The teacher, miller, tanner, if any, and other highly specialized occupations were permanent appointments, but the common workers periodically exchanged their tasks. The main occupation has been farming though each *Bruderhof* specializes in some side line. Each colony is likely to have a mill, and all engaged in sheep raising; Bon Homme stressed fishing before they left the banks of the Missouri; Wolf Creek in broom making; another makes much of raising pigeons which find a fancy price in the city markets.

Small children are taken care of in a common nursery; the older ones are sent to school until fourteen, when they are supposed to take their place in the economic order of the community. Until the state and provincial laws set up certain standards, the school program was simple, consisting of reading, writing, a little arithmetic, Bible and instruction in some of the practical arts. Teachers were selected from the colony and poorly trained usually. The language was Tyrolean German. Now, however, teachers must teach in English and must meet the state requirements. In case no one from the colony meets these requirements some outside teacher must be employed which has frequently occurred since World War I though the young men of the colony are increasingly preparing themselves for this task.

In their religious practises the Hutterites are still decidedly conservative. Preachers are selected by lot and have no special training. Sermons are read from a book of sermons in manuscript form in the German language. Peter Riedemann's *Confession of Faith*, printed in Germany in 1562, and published for the first time in America in 1902 is the basis of their church doctrine. Their hymns,



largely martyr stories, dating back to the sixteenth century, are sung without notes, with the melody only, to tunes perhaps centuries old. The old hymn book printed only recently for the first time perhaps rivals the Amish *Ausbund* as the oldest hymn book still in use by any Christian church in the world.

The social contacts of the Hutterites with the outside world have been meager, and their knowledge of what is going on is very limited. Many of their social customs have been perpetuated from middle Europe, common centuries ago. Clothes are very plain; in some cases hooks and eyes are still retained; often still homemade, of a style ages old, always of a somber color. The great social event of the year is the wedding which lasts for several days and is usually staged in the fall after the harvest has been gathered. Courtship is not permitted officially until after the engagement has been announced from the pulpit. Formerly matches were made by the elders but today each young man is permitted to select his own bride. There are no bachelors nor spinsters nor many widowers in these Households.

In its ecclesiastical government the *Brudershof* is not quite as independent as in its economic arrangements. Each colony has its own minister, and a group of them a common elder. These various elders from all the colonies frequently meet to discuss their common problems. And their decisions have considerable weight in each *Brudershof* as is always the case in a deeply religious society. The minister always is a most important individual.

The American Hutterites have not only preserved much of their middle European religious and traditional culture, but in all their wanderings have retained their original racial strains with practically little addition since.

All told, the entire Hutterite population today is the offspring of some fifteen European families running back several hundred years—*Tschetter, Hofer, Kleinsasser, Glänzer, Waldner, Mändl, Gross, Wipf, Stahl, Walter, Würz, Knels, Wollman, Decker, Entz*. Only one of these families comes originally from Moravia. The families *Decker, Entz, Knels (Cornelsen), Wollman (Wallman)* were of Low German-Prussian-Russian background. No new family names have been added in America.

As an economic experiment Hutterite communism has been a success. Life was simple. No money was wasted on luxuries. There was never any unemployment. Relief was never needed. And there was no social security problem for old age. Surplus profits were large and were always invested in additional Households for the rapidly expanding population.

In this connection it should be mentioned that after World War I a *Bruderhof* originated near Fulda, in Germany, inspired by the Hutterian example and as a direct result of the longing of some Christians for a true Christian brotherhood in the disturbed post-war era. Eberhard Arnold, its leader, was ordained by an elder of the American Hutterites. In 1937 these German Hutterites migrated to England where they established the *Cotswold* and the *Oaksey Bruderhof*. In 1940, these colonies migrated to Primavera, Paraguay. By now the Paraguayan *Bruderhof* is composed of German, English, Dutch, Swiss, and other nationalities. There is still a *Bruderhof* functioning in England. It should be borne in mind that these new Hutterite colonies are composed mainly of members of high cultural interests and appreciations. In many instances the members were professors, ministers, doctors and other intellectuals. In contrast to the old North American Hutterites these

Hutterites are filled with a zeal for testifying for their newly adopted way of life.

When the Hutterites came from Russia to South Dakota not all of them settled in *Bruderhof* communities. Probably half of them settled on individual farms like the other Mennonites, organizing in churches. Many of these have joined the General Conference and Krimmer Mennonite Brethren. Others are still unaffiliated.

### **Prussian and Swiss Groups**

In the meantime several other small groups of non-Russian European Mennonites joined their Russian brethren in settling our western prairies. These, too, have since joined the Western District as well as the General Conference. Among these was a small colony from the *Prussian* congregation of Heubuden. Although the new German Imperial Constitution of 1871 respected the non-combatant privileges granted the Mennonites in the Cabinet Order of 1868, yet there were still some German Mennonites, specially in the conservative Heubuden congregation who objected to any sort of service under military control, even though non-combatant, as being contrary to their religious convictions. It was this group, it will be remembered, that was represented by Wilhelm Ewert in the deputation trip of 1873. Ewert himself and several others came to America to stay in 1874. In 1876 a score or more of families under the leadership of Elder Johann Andreas left for America, spending the winter at Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, where their elder died. The group divided the next spring, part of them locating in Kansas near Newton; and the others in Nebraska along the Blue near Beatrice. In the early eighties about a dozen families from the ill-fated Asiatic Khiva adventure joined this colony.

Mention should be made here, too, of the settlement made by about seventy-five families from Galicia in the late eighties in Kansas and Minnesota. These *Galicians*, it may be recalled, were originally South Germans who had migrated to Galicia from Bavaria, Alsace and also Switzerland upon invitation by the Austrian Emperor Joseph near the close of the eighteenth century soon after the emperor fell heir to Galicia on the occasion of the first partitioning of Poland. About one-third of the party came to Kansas, and two-thirds to Minnesota.

About the same time, too, a number of families directly from Switzerland located near the Prussian colony at *Whitewater*, Kansas.

### Population Growth

The Russian Mennonites on the plains of America, like their brethren on the steppes of Russia, increased rapidly in numbers. Land was plentiful and cheap; labor was in demand; marriages were early and frequent, and families were large. Population increase almost reached its biological limit. The eighteen thousand who arrived between 1873 and 1883, not counting of course the more recent immigrants since 1923, have since grown to some eighty-five thousand. The growth of church membership likewise was almost identical with that of the population. Their large compact, closed farm communities, with their German language and foreign customs kept their own children from leaving them, and others from joining. They held their own better than any other group in all Mennonite history save their own brethren in Russia before them, who lived much under the same pioneer conditions.

Although living a life apart from the rest of the world at first, many of the younger element among the Russian Mennonites, particularly of the second and third

generations have played a creditable part in the political and cultural development of the country. Peter Jansen of Beatrice, Nebraska, son of Cornelius, became a prominent rancher, and early entered the public life of his adopted state, being several times elected to the state legislature serving for a time as state senator. In 1896 he was a member from his state of the resolutions committee in the Republican National Convention which drafted the famous gold plank of that campaign. Several years later he was appointed by President McKinley as one of the commissioners of the world's fair at Paris. A son of H. H. Ewert, founder of the Gretna, Canada school, was a Rhodes scholar at Oxford, England, and is now a professor at that venerable university. A young man from Mountain Lake, Minnesota, Albert Penner, of the third generation, for a time pastor at the famous Jonathan Edwards Church at Northampton, Massachusetts, and now serving the Broadway Tabernacle, New York City, was a delegate to the World Council of Churches, Amsterdam, 1948.

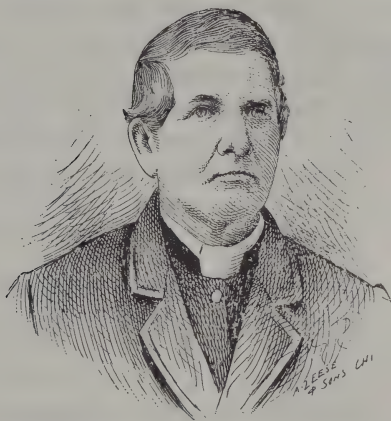
All through the west men and women of German-Russian Mennonite parentage are holding positions of usefulness and influence in business, as public officials, school superintendents, college and university professors, doctors. and in other roles of public trust.

## THE GENERAL CONFERENCE OF MENNONITES

The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, although having its origin in congregations of Pennsylvania German and more recent South German background, is at present composed of congregations with a predominantly Russo-German background. This mixture of cultural background is characteristic of



the Conference ever since it began as a unification movement in 1860. Unlike the Old Mennonites and Amish who are composed of a homogenous Pennsylvania German background, it is composed of congregations with a Swiss, South German, Swiss Galician, Swiss Volhynian, Hutterite, Amish, Polish German, Prussian, but above all, of Russo-German background, making it the most



John H. Oberholtzer (1809-1895)

heterogenous union of all Mennonite conferences in America.

### **John H. Oberholtzer**

J. H. Oberholtzer and his followers, as already noted, after their expulsion from the Franconia Conference in 1847, immediately organized themselves into a new religious body. Oberholtzer began a vigorous campaign for the spread of his cause. For the advancement of the religious interests of the congregations which had cast their lot with his, he founded in his home town, Milford Square, the first Mennonite church paper in America

called *Religiöser Botschafter*, later changed into *Das Christliche Volksblatt*. These papers he used to good advantage in advocating a closer union among a number of isolated Mennonite communities.

Although Oberholtzer was active in promoting the interests of the new movement, he had not entirely abandoned the hope of effecting a reconciliation with the old church. He sincerely desired a union, and as late as 1860 he suggested in a pamphlet called *Verantwortung und Erläuterung* the terms upon which the two groups of churches might come together. These terms, however, were rejected by the old church, and so no reconciliation was possible. At the same time, too, he was advocating through his church paper a union of all the Mennonite congregations of America.

In the meantime a progressive movement, similar in many respects to the one in Franconia had been making headway among a few of the scattered churches near Niagara Falls, in Lincoln county, Ontario, in behalf of more aggressive church work, especially of greater evangelistic efforts, under the leadership of a minister by the name of Daniel Hoch. In 1853, Hoch was appointed at a meeting of this group of churches as a visiting minister to various scattered congregations in the region. He also had come into contact evidently with a small congregation at Wadsworth, Ohio, composed of a few families, who had recently come there from Pennsylvania under the leadership of Ephraim Hunsberger, for in 1855 these two groups organized themselves into the *Conference Council of the Mennonite Communities of Canada-West and Ohio*. The purpose of the organization seems to have been to promote greater evangelistic and missionary zeal among the churches.

Oberholtzer had taken a deep interest in the Canadian

movement from the very beginning, for here might be an opportunity perhaps of enlarging the circle of congregations that favored a more liberal church policy, and the beginning of the realization of a dream which he already began to cherish, namely the unification of all the Mennonite churches of America. Consequently in the *Volksblatt*, in 1856, he advocated the union of the Canada-Ohio conference with his own Pennsylvania conference in the interests of the mission cause, and suggested a general council of the two conferences. This plan was favorably received by the Canada churches, and resolutions were passed by the Conference in its session of 1857 urging that steps be taken in this direction, but no further results followed at this time.

### Initial Meetings

While this subject was being agitated in the east, a similar movement had begun in the west. In Lee county Iowa, there were two small congregations composed largely of Bavarian and Palatinate immigrants who had come to the state some few years before. They were located near the Amish settlement, which had been made some time earlier. But being more recently from Europe than the Amish, and differing from them in customs and practises they never worked in harmony with them. Consequently these two congregations found themselves somewhat isolated from the other Iowa churches. Feeling the need of united effort especially in evangelistic work among such members of the church as had settled some distance from the main body, a joint meeting of the West Point and Zion congregations was brought about at West Point in 1859, largely through the influence of Daniel Krehbiel, who continued for the rest of his days a most enthusiastic advocate of the unification cause. Another leader of the union movement for the Iowa

churches was Christian Schowalter, also a South German immigrant, and at this time a teacher in the parochial school at the Zion congregation. According to the resolutions passed at this meeting its purpose was to "devise ways on the one hand for the centralization of the Mennonite churches, but chiefly on the other for supplying isolated families with the Gospel blessings." The ideal of the union of all Mennonite churches seems to have captured the imagination of the leaders of the Lee county congregations also. Near the close of the meeting after an urgent plea by Daniel Krehbiel, it was decided to extend a general invitation to other Mennonite churches to meet with them in another conference at West Point the following year. The report of the initial meeting together with the invitation for the coming year were published in the Pennsylvania paper, the *Christliche Volksblatt*.

Oberholtzer naturally was also interested in the Iowa movement. During the year he repeatedly urged through the columns of his paper that both the Pennsylvania and the Canada congregations send representatives to the meeting in Lee county. Neither, however, seemed enthusiastic in responding to the invitation, and that for several reasons. In the first place Iowa at that time was on the frontier line of American civilization, and why should the eastern churches go so far west to attend a meeting the purpose of which was to form a union of congregations almost all of which were in the east. Secondly, the Iowans were recent European immigrants in whom the easterners, whose ancestors had been in this country for more than a century, felt little personal interest. Neither of the eastern conferences appointed delegates to the western meeting. Hoch and Oberholtzer appeared to be the only individuals in the least interested in the enterprise, and it seemed extremely doubtful whether even they would be able to attend because of

financial considerations. But finally at the last moment through the generosity of a friend it was made possible for Oberholtzer and one companion to be present. These two men were the only representatives at the meeting from the churches outside of the Iowa congregations.

### **The Conference Founded**

The conference, if indeed it may be called such, was held May 28-29, 1860, near West Point, and was composed of the two congregations already named, another minister from a nearby settlement, and the two representatives from Pennsylvania. Oberholtzer was chosen chairman, and Christian Schowalter, of the neighboring congregation, secretary. Although unpretentious and local in character, this meeting was not deterred by that fact from discussing a lofty and ambitious ideal, namely the unification of all the Mennonites of America under one working organization. Deploring the fact that there was so much factionalism among the Mennonites, and that the denomination "has never since its existence in America constituted an ecclesiastical organization," and further that because of this factionalism there is "a corresponding decline in spiritual life," the assembly drew up a set of resolutions which it was hoped would serve as a common platform upon which all might unite for the extension of the mission and other interests of the church. These resolutions are as follows:

1. That all branches of the Mennonite denomination in North America regardless of minor differences, should extend to each other the hand of fellowship.
2. That fraternal relations shall be severed only when a person or church abandons the fundamental doctrines of the denomination; namely, those concerning baptism, the oath, etc., as indeed all the principles of the faith which we with Menno base solely upon the Gospel as received from Jesus Christ and His apostles.



3. That no brother shall be found guilty of heresy unless his error can be established on unequivocal scripture evidence.
4. That the General Conference shall consider no excommunication as scripturally valid unless a real transgression or neglect conflicting with the demands of Scripture exists.
5. That every church or district shall be entitled to continue without molestation or hindrance and amenable only to their own conscience any rules or regulations they may have adopted for their own government; provided they do not conflict with the tenets of our general confession.
6. That if a member of a church, because of existing customs or ordinances in his church, shall desire to sever his connection and unite with some other church of the General Conference such action shall not be interfered with.

As just indicated, the motive for this united action was to provide for more effective evangelistic efforts, but two other subjects were also discussed during the meeting—the establishing of a publishing house and an institution for theological training. Both of these measures had been advocated for several years by such men as Oberholtzer, Hoch and Daniel Krehbiel, and these men were undoubtedly responsible for introducing them into the discussions at this time. After a two days' session, the assembly adjourned, but not before it was decided to meet again the following year at Wadsworth, Ohio.

Thus was launched the *General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America*. The aim of the movement was an ambitious but worthy one. Just how seriously the leaders of the cause at this time entertained the thought of a union of all the Mennonites it is not easy to say. It may be safely inferred, however, that none were so sanguine as to expect the fulfillment of the work in their own day, for such a task would have been an impossible one. The gap between the opposite extremes of Mennonite custom and practise of that time was too wide

to be bridged over easily. But a union of some of the more progressive of the older American Mennonite churches and a number of the recent immigrant congregations was entirely feasible, and the leaders of the movement undoubtedly hardly hoped to see more than that much of their plan accomplished in their own day. The dozen or so of the Pennsylvania congregations of course would likely come into the union, as would also a number of the South German churches in Summerfield, Illinois, and Hayesville and Cleveland, Ohio, all of whom were bound to the Lee county people by ties of kinship. The Wadsworth congregation of tolerant Pennsylvanians would also be likely to join the movement. And so would the two or three Canadian congregations under the influence of Hoch. But beyond these scattered congregations there was not a strong probability that many others could be secured for the cause in the immediate future. And yet this time was more opportune, perhaps, than any later period would have been for attempting such a program. For none of the Alsatian Amish churches nor the older Mennonite churches in Ohio, Illinois and Iowa had as yet formed themselves into conference districts. Each congregation was independent of all others and some had already departed somewhat from the older traditions and customs. A few of these in more recent years have affiliated themselves with the movement, but after the organization of conferences of their own and especially after they came under the influence of the conservative elements of the east the probability of an affiliation with the General Conference had passed. The growth of the movement has since been confined largely to isolated congregations of later Russian and Swiss Mennonites and other scattered congregations.

The General Conference, however, was hardly a fact as yet in 1860. Neither the Canada-Ohio Council, nor the

few other independent congregations which it was hoped might be brought into line had accepted the first invitation. It remained to be seen what action these would take at the next meeting at Wadsworth.

This session, the second to be held, met at Wadsworth, Medina county, Ohio, May 20, 1861, in the very days of the opening of the Civil War. It was soon found that the unification movement was taking root, for now eight congregations were represented, including in addition to those present the year before, those at Waterloo, Ontario, Summerfield, Illinois, and several of the Oberholtzer following in Pennsylvania. Daniel Hoch of Canada, and Daniel Hege of Summerfield were elected chairman and secretary respectively. Two new subjects were discussed at this meeting. A new article discouraging secret societies was added to the platform adopted the year before, and the first steps were taken toward the establishing of a theological school. Daniel Hege, a well-educated minister of the Summerfield congregation, was appointed as home evangelist and was authorized to visit all the churches in the interest of missions and the new school. After signing a formal unification agreement, the assembly adjourned to meet again, the time and place to be decided by the chairman and secretary. The conference was now a fact. After this, sessions were held regularly, at first biennially, but later triennially.

### **Continued Growth**

The third meeting was held in Summerfield in 1863. The chief discussion at this time concerned the proposed school, and further steps were taken toward its organization. Triennial meetings were agreed upon and also a method of representation according to the size of the affiliated congregation. From this time on the Conference maintained a steady growth. Nearly every succeed-

ing meeting showed a gain in the number of affiliating congregations. At first, of course, the new additions came from the Pennsylvania Oberholtzer churches. But in 1875 the Swiss congregation at Berne, Indiana, was represented for the first time by S. F. Sprunger. And the following year at a special session the first immigrant church, the Alexanderwohl congregation, was represented by Henry Richert and H. Goerz. Twenty congregations were present by delegates at this session. After this most of the additions came from the recent Russian immigrant churches whose sympathies had been won to the leaders of the General Conference movement both because of the help they had received in settling in their new home and also because of their interest in the cause of missions, an interest which was shared by a number of the Russian churches. The meeting of 1893 was held at Bluffton, Ohio. For the first time the Swiss churches at Bluffton and Dalton, Ohio, and the Amish congregations at Trenton, Ohio, and Noble, Iowa, sent delegates. Fifty churches were represented at this meeting, eighteen coming from Kansas. Each succeeding session now recorded some new additions either from immigrant or some other isolated congregations which for various reasons had not become identified with any of the other special Mennonite conferences which were being formed in the meantime.

In 1947 a total of two hundred and fifty congregations were affiliated with the General Conference with a total population of more than seventy thousand, of which about fifty thousand were members. The above does not include the mission churches on the various continents and the South American Mennonite churches which have joined recently.

Among the men, in addition to those already mentioned, who played an important part in the early forma-

tive period of the movement must be mentioned A. B. Shelly of Pennsylvania, president of the Conference continuously from 1872 to 1896, and interested in all its various lines of work; Christian Krehbiel, of Summerfield, Illinois, but later from Halstead, Kansas, a South German immigrant, interested in the Russian immigration, and one of the leaders in the Indian mission cause; David Goerz, a Russian immigrant, and one of the leaders in bringing the Russians into the General Conference; Henry Richert, from the Alexanderwohl congregation, also a leader among the Russians; J. C. Krehbiel, chairman of the first meeting in 1859 at West Point, and a member of many important committees later; S. F. Sprunger of Berne, Indiana; Ben Eicher, leader among the Amish churches in Henry county, Iowa; Daniel Hege, the first home evangelist and collector of funds for the Wadsworth school; C. J. van der Smissen, theological professor at Wadsworth, and later secretary of the Mission Board; J. S. Moyer of Pennsylvania; John S. Hirschler of Kansas; A. S. Shelly, prominent in the Eastern Pennsylvania District Conference, and editor for many years of the *Mennonite*; J. B. Baer, promoter of the mission cause and early evangelist; and N. B. Grubb, pioneer pastor of the First Mennonite Church of Philadelphia, founder of the *Mennonite*, and serving for many years on many important committees. Among recent leaders active in conference work were P. R. Schroder, P. H. Richert, C. E. Krehbiel, David Toews, and A. Warkentin.

### The Wadsworth School

The two questions that occupied much of the time and thought of the Conference during the first twenty years of the history of the movement were education and missions. The school at Wadsworth held the center of



interest from 1863, when the first committee was appointed, until 1878, when it was forced to close its doors. It took six years after Daniel Hege began to collect funds in 1862, before the school was opened. The institution which was known as *The Christian Educational Institution of the Mennonite Denomination* was located at Wadsworth, Ohio, which was thought to be the most centrally located between the east and the west. It opened its doors on January 2, 1868, with Christian Schowalter, of Iowa, as principal, one other teacher, and twenty-four students. Its purpose was primarily to train young men for Christian work, although secular subjects were also taught. During the same year C. J. van der Smissen from Friedrichstadt, Germany, was called to the chair of theology with the assurance that the position was to last the rest of his natural life.

The course of study covered three years. Prospective students were admitted by examination, and no qualifications were prescribed other than a good character and an age limit between eighteen and thirty.

The instruction was to be principally in the German language, even the Pennsylvanians at this time using that language exclusively in their religious worship, and Pennsylvania Dutch in their social intercourse. The school was for boys only. Early in its history, the Pennsylvania churches suggested that it be made co-educational, but the Germans from the west and especially the German bred "theological professor" van der Smissen, and his wife opposed the suggestion so strongly that women were reluctantly admitted. Practical living and high thinking evidently were to be combined. For each student was to spend three hours each day in some sort of "manual labor" for the sake of his mental and physical health and for the benefit of the institution. That this program was carried out is evidenced by glancing through

a random list of assignments by the steward for one day. On this particular day one person was to do stable work; two were to peel potatoes; two were to carry wood to the kitchen, and another was to take a wagon to the village blacksmith; still another was to fasten the wash line; three were to work at carpentering, and two at shoe-making; two persons were to saw wood, and one to borrow the saw from one of the townsmen; one was to go for the mail and another to take meat to Hunsbergers to be smoked; while all the rest were to cut wood. This was one day's assignment. Thus it was hoped that expenses might be kept down. But the cost of getting an education was not high at its best. For the sum of one hundred dollars per year the student was entitled to "instruction, board, lodging, washing, fuel and light."

The school never prospered. The attendance hardly ever went beyond that of the opening day. It began with a deficit in the building fund, and poor financing handicapped its work throughout its entire career. Although there were only three teachers, expenses could hardly be met. Besides financial difficulties there were personal differences within the faculty. Schowalter and van der Smisen did not agree upon matters of policy, and the former finally resigned, leaving to the latter the entire management of the educational policy of the institution. Finally the churches of the west and those of Pennsylvania disagreed as to certain questions of management, with the result that the school had to close with a heavy debt, a theological professor hired for life, and but few students in 1878, just ten years after the first students had entered its doors for instruction. This experiment in higher education, however, was not a complete failure. Many of the later leaders of the church received their initial training in this pioneer Mennonite institution.

## The Mission Interest

In its other major objective, the mission cause, the General Conference was more successful though equally slow in getting started. Although founding of a missionary society was one of the first official acts of the Conference, it was some time before any actual missionary work was undertaken. S. S. Haury, a graduate of the Wadsworth school, became the first volunteer, but the Conference remained undecided for a number of years both as to the location of a mission station and the best means of establishing the work. After some communication with the Mennonite society in Amsterdam with a view to supporting their work in the East Indies, it was finally decided to form an independent mission enterprise, and to begin the work among the American Indians. S. S. Haury and J. B. Baer were sent on an extended trip through Alaska looking for a desirable field for Indian mission work, but after a preliminary survey, and finding the Alaskan field already well occupied by the Presbyterians, they returned still undecided as to a definite location. Finally, by 1880, Haury and his wife established the first American Mennonite mission, then called a foreign mission, among the Arapahoe Indians in what was then Indian Territory, but now Oklahoma.

The General Conference was the first branch of the Mennonite church to carry on missionary effort among the American Indians, and this work has always played an important part in their missionary enterprise. Later on, stations were established among the Cheyennes in the old Indian Territory and in Manitoba, as well as among the Hopis in Arizona. In all these centers, effective work among the Indians is still being continued, though with considerable difficulty in Arizona where the Indian tribal life has been abandoned for special farm allotments, and

where the former compact settlements are becoming more widely scattered. In addition to S. S. Haury, as the pioneer missionary, special mention should be made, among a number of other veterans, of two men, who were outstanding not only as missionaries but also for their research into the folklore and languages of the Arapahoe and Cheyenne tribes, H. R. Voth and Rodolphe Petter. The results of Voth's ethnological studies among the Arapahoes were published in a number of volumes, and together with a rare collection of relics is now to be found in the Chicago Natural History Museum. Voth and several other missionaries in this field reduced the Arapahoe language to writing and have made many translations into it. Rodolphe Petter's work was among the Cheyennes. For nearly fifty years he worked on a dictionary of the Cheyenne language, and also translated nearly the entire Bible into that tongue. He is regarded by the officials of the Smithsonian Institute as the best authority on the Cheyenne language in America.

Mission work abroad was begun in India in 1900, and grew out of relief work carried on under Conference direction in the famine stricken districts several years before. The first missionaries were P. A. Penner and J. F. Kroeker and their wives. At first missionary effort was limited largely to evangelism and to taking care of the children left orphans by the famine; but since then increased attention has been given to both educational and industrial work, and especially to the care of lepers. An outstanding leader in this field was P. A. Penner, who was in continual service for nearly forty years, during which time he established the second largest, and one of the finest leper asylums in all India, for which he was given generous government support and the highest praise by the British inspectors. Somewhat later a mis-

sion station was established in China. The Conference also sponsors several home missions in the cities, though many of these are the direct responsibility of the local district conferences.

The General Conference today supports about one hundred twenty-five missionaries on the field with an annual budget of approximately \$200,000.

## Objectives

The General Conference has never forsaken the objectives of its original sponsors—a union of the various Mennonite groups into a common working organization for the promotion of common church interests, missions, education and publication. To make the attainment of this goal possible the slight differences which separated the groups had to be minimized, and only the fundamentals of Mennonitism upon which all could still agree emphasized. The sessions of the Conference have remained almost entirely advisory, with discipline left to the local districts.

These objectives are well stated by H. P. Krehbiel, the chief historian of the movement:

The churches constituting the General Conference have by their union not become something different from what they were before. Each church remains just what it was, and retains all the peculiarities she had if she chooses. Each church retains her individuality as well as her independence. It is not a separate class or division of Mennonites which may be distinguished from others by special doctrines or customs. It is impossible to class the Conference as such a division because her membership list contains churches which differ very much in customs and special views, and which to this day retain these differences precisely as they did previously to uniting with the Conference. The General Conference is therefore in no sense a branch or division of the denomination.



And yet, although the General Conference aims to be merely an advisory body, and a convenient means for furthering common religious efforts, the fact that it must necessarily set up definite qualifications for admission to membership into the union gives it somewhat the character of a separate ecclesiastical body. The revised constitution of 1929 prescribes as a test of membership that the congregations which unite with the Conference "hold fast to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, baptism on confession of faith, the avoidance of oaths, the biblical doctrine of non-resistance, and the practice of a scriptural church discipline." An earlier constitution, that of 1896, contained the added stipulation that congregations tolerating members of secret societies and those addicted to the drink evil should be barred from membership in the Conference, a regulation that is still in force theoretically, though not rigidly applied.

In recent years there has been a growing tendency on the part of certain of the more conservative element to transform the loose confederation of 1860 into a firmer union with more definite doctrinal commitments and disciplinary powers over individual congregations. In 1902 the Cornelis Ris *Confession* was officially published and recommended for general use among the churches. Out of the lodge controversy, too, has arisen a standing committee on doctrine and conduct which must attempt to justify its existence not only by encouraging sentiment against the lodge, but also by recommending from time to time the enforcement of certain other doctrinal views.

### Conference Organization

The Conference meets every three years and is composed of delegates elected by the participating congregations which are given voting power according to the size

of their individual membership. The sessions are devoted largely to the discussion of reports from the various standing Boards—Missions, Education, Publication and Emergency Relief, and such temporary committees as have been appointed for special purposes. The congregations composing the General Conference are in turn grouped into seven district conferences, all distinct from one another—the Eastern, Middle, Central, Northern, Pacific, Canadian, and the Western District which last is the largest. The church government is congregational, each minister usually being an elder; that is, having full power to administer all the religious rites demanded by the church. There are no superior officers.

As already noted, the support of the mission cause has remained one of the chief concerns of the Conference.

### Peace Testimony

The congregations of the General Conference, together with the other Mennonite groups, have been most generous in the support of their famine stricken and persecuted brethren in Russia since World War I; but most of this work has been carried on through cooperative organizations such as the *Mennonite Central Committee*, the *Canadian Colonization Board* and other Mennonite relief agencies. The special *Emergency Relief* Board of the General Conference has not done much individual work except to urge the support of these larger and more general committees.

The General Conference, and especially the Russian contingent, has always been vitally interested in the preservation of the traditional Mennonite peace principles, although the subsidiary district conferences, especially the Western District have been more active in promoting the cause. During World War I when hundreds

of Mennonite young men were drafted into the army the General Conference in its session held at Reedley, California in 1917, appointed a committee of seven to co-operate with the district committees and similar organizations of other branches of the church to present to the government a united statement of Mennonite peace principles, as well as to aid the young men in the service to adapt themselves to the demands of the exemption law, and appear in their behalf before the military authorities both in Washington and the various camps, the latter of whom too often were ignorant of the terms of the exemption law, and thoroughly out of sympathy with the principles of its beneficiaries.

The war experiences convinced the leaders that more positive teaching of peace doctrines was necessary than had prevailed before. A special Peace Committee was added to the other committees of the Conference, which has since done effective service for the cause in the way of publishing peace tracts, holding peace meetings, furnishing regular peace lessons for the Sunday school quarterlies, cooperating with other non-resistant groups, especially the Quakers and Dunkards, in peace conventions and institutes, and in many other ways keeping the cause of the peace continually before the church. In cooperation with the Young People's Union of the General Conference the Peace Committee has been sponsoring a number of voluntary service projects in the United States and Canada.

### **Affiliation with the Federal Council**

For a short period, from 1908 to 1917, the Mennonite General Conference was affiliated with the Federal Council of Churches. But after 1914 the growing militarism developing in the Federal Council aroused a good deal of opposition among some of the peace loving Mennonites

to the continuance of the connection. A special committee was appointed to study the question. This committee, reporting to the 1917 session, and disagreeing on its findings, gave a majority and minority report, the majority favoring the continuation of the affiliation. But a vote before the conference favored the minority report and the connection with the Federal Council was discontinued. Among other charges brought against the Federal Council at this time were the liberal attitude of many of the members of the organization to "higher criticism, secret societies, and modernism in theology."

### Shift to the West and North

During the early years the whole Conference movement was dominated by the influence of the eastern Pennsylvania Mennonites, but in course of time with the addition of a large number of congregations of the Russian contingent the control has gradually shifted to the west. According to the Conference report of 1947 a total of two hundred and fifty congregations are affiliated with the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America and its districts. Of these, twenty-eight congregations belong to the Eastern District, sixty-seven to the Western District and fifty-seven to the Canadian Conference. The Central Conference of Mennonites with its twenty congregations officially joined the General Conference in 1946. However, the greatest growth of the Conference during the last decades took place in Canada because of the large number of Russian Mennonite immigrants after World War I and II. Thus there can be observed a shift of population and strength from the east to the west and more recently to Canada. Between World War I and II the publications were transferred from Berne, Indiana, to Newton, Kansas, where in 1943 the General Conference established its headquarters

and publication office. This shift of control to the more recent European arrivals from both Russia and Germany accounts largely for the fact that both the German language and culture have been retained longer in the General Conference than among other Mennonite groups. Fortunately this shift of control has not weakened but rather strengthened the cause of peace among the American Mennonites; for the Mennonites from Russia, with the possible exception of some of the more recent arrivals, having migrated to America largely because of their scruples against war, are more peace minded than many of the older groups.

### **Toward a United Witness**

More than a century ago Mennonite congregations united to strengthen their efforts in mission work, in education and publication which led to the founding of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America. Under the motto: "Unity in essentials, tolerance in non-essentials, and charity in all things," the conference has experienced a steady growth. In 1946 the Central Conference joined and in 1947 at the Berne session of the Conference twenty individual congregations joined. Through its various boards and committees, such as the Unity Committee, the conference keeps in touch with congregations and groups that seek affiliation.

The Conference has whole-heartedly cooperated in such enterprises as the All-Mennonite Convention, the Conference on Mennonite Cultural Problems, Civilian Public Service work and the relief projects of the Mennonite Central Committee.



# XIV

## IN SEARCH OF FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

### CANADA

The Russian *Studien-Kommission* of 1920, spoken of elsewhere, after visiting the United States, Mexico and Canada, finally decided that under existing conditions, the last country held out the best prospects as a refuge for their persecuted brethren. A. A. Friesen, a member of the commission, remained in Canada, and later played an important role in all the early phases of the immigration movement. But even here there were difficulties in the way, the most formidable, seemingly, being the Order in Council of 1919, still in force, at the time, forbidding the immigration of Mennonites into the Dominion.

But the Canadian Mennonites, their hearts filled with compassion for their suffering Russian co-religionists, and determined to help them escape from their hard lot at any cost, were not dismayed by seemingly impossible barriers.

The Canadian General Conference in its annual session at Herbert, Saskatchewan, in 1921, appointed H. H. Ewert as a delegate to cooperate with H. A. Neufeld, representing the Mennonite Brethren, and S. F. Coffman, of the Old Mennonites, and A. A. Friesen, in a visit to the Dominion capital at Ottawa in an attempt to secure a repeal of the Order in Council in question. Fortunate for the immigration cause, just at this time, was the victory in the general elections of this year of the Liberal party;

and the election as prime minister of the Dominion Government of William Lyon Mackenzie King, who, having lived in Kitchener, Ontario, as a young man, was well acquainted with the Mennonites of that region for whom he had a high regard.

With the aid of the new prime minister, the objectionable Order in Council was soon rescinded, and the door was thrown wide open for the admission of the Russian Mennonites. There were several conditions, however. The immigrants must settle on the land; they must not become a burden to the state; and they must pass a rigorous health test at the European port of embarkation.

### **The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization**

In the meantime, for the purpose of aiding the proposed immigration movement, the different branches of the Canadian Mennonite church formed an organization which they called the *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization*, with David Toews, of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, as its president and chief promoter.

But permission to enter the country was only the first step in the movement to bring over the thousands of Russian Mennonite prospects who were eager to exchange the terrors of their native soil for the promised land of Canada. Nearly all of the prospective immigrants, having been completely stripped of all their possessions by the Russian Bolsheviks, had scarcely enough money left with which to buy their passports, to say nothing about the means for covering the expenses of their ocean transportation.

After considering various financial schemes, none of which seemed promising at first, the Colonization Board finally turned to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, with its extensive railway system, its fleet of ocean steamers, and vast stretches of uncultivated prairie lands,

as offering the most likely source of help for carrying out an extended immigration and settlement project. Here again the Board was fortunate in finding a sympathetic friend in Colonel C. S. Dennis, chief commissioner of the railroad company's department of immigration and development, who as a young man in his twenties, had been officially connected with that other migration of Russian Mennonites to Manitoba some fifty years before; and who remembered the valuable service rendered by these pioneers in the settling of the raw prairies of that province.

### **Help from the Canadian Pacific**

Through the efforts of Colonel Dennis, and President Beatty, who likewise was friendly to the project, the Canadian Pacific Railway Company agreed to finance the whole enterprise on the condition that the Colonization Board enter a contract promising to repay the railroad company the whole transportation expense within eighteen months after the arrival of the immigrants. The first contract called for the transportation of three thousand persons from the Black Sea to Winnipeg at \$140.00 per person, counting up, all told, well toward half a million dollars.

The officers of the Board did not see where this amount of money was to come from; and such Mennonites as feared that the action of the Board might obligate the entire Mennonite church, were bitterly opposed to the whole scheme. But the Canadian Pacific insisted on the signing of the contract before a single Mennonite could be brought across. David Toews then, as president of the Board, his heart filled with compassion for his suffering Russian brethren, on his own initiative, fully aware that the contract could not be carried out within the specified time, blindly signed the agreement, trusting

providence for the results. Providence did not fail him. It appeared a little later that the railroad company could not fulfill its part of the contract either, especially that part which called for the embarkation of the Mennonites from a Black Sea port, due to certain disease epidemics then prevalent in that area. The Canadian Pacific, therefore, did not demand that the Board live up to the letter of the bond, postponing from time to time the due date for the repayment of the transportation expenses; and at the same time even entering into new contracts for further immigration quotas.

Just how to provide for the temporary needs of these large groups of penniless refugees, and start them out on the road of self-support even after they did arrive here was another problem that taxed the faith and ingenuity of David Toews and his co-workers to the uttermost. How would the Canadian Mennonites, many of whom, as just indicated, were lukewarm on the whole enterprise, react to the assumption of this added burden? These were matters of grave concern to the leaders of the movement.

Great was the satisfaction, therefore, of these men when upon the arrival at Rosthern, on July 22, 1923, of the first train load of some six hundred immigrants, more than enough automobiles, buggies and wagons from the large Mennonite settlements nearby were on hand to welcome these exiles to their prairie homes until such time as permanent quarters could be found for them. Before the year was up nearly three thousand penniless refugees had found their way to the promised land, and temporarily distributed among the various Mennonite settlements throughout Saskatchewan, Alberta, Manitoba and Ontario.

In the years immediately following they came by the thousands, culminating in the peak year of 1926, when the number of arrivals reached the figure of 5,940. But by this time the movement had nearly exhausted itself,

not, as already said, because the Canadian Government, and the Canadian Pacific Railway Company opposed the continuation of the stream of arrivals, nor because there was a lack of desire on the part of the Russian Mennonites to leave their native land, but rather because by this time the Soviet authorities had developed a decided distaste for the reflection which had been cast upon their communistic practises by the wholesale desire to emigrate on the part of their best farmers and most industrious citizens. By raising the price of passports to impossible levels after they had already dispossessed the well-to-do Mennonites of all their property, and by putting other hindrances in their way, the Russian governmental authorities made emigration practically impossible. In 1927, 847 Mennonites left Russia, and the next year only 511. Mennonite immigration to Canada had just about come to a close.

But soon after this, in 1929, a new group of Russian refugees, some 13,000, not all Mennonites, had gathered at Moscow seeking escape from the red terror. The plight of these refugees, desiring entrance to Canada was first learned by the Canadians from the metropolitan press. But both the economic and political conditions in Canada had changed materially in the meantime. The western provinces especially, had been struck by an economic depression that had brought in its wake a great deal of unemployment, financial stringency and hard times in general; political control had been reversed, too, in most of the provinces, as well as in the Dominion Government. In the general election of this year the Liberal party had lost to their Conservative rivals, who had never been sympathetic toward the generous immigration policies of the Liberals.

The newly-elected Conservative premier of Saskatchewan, reading in the papers soon after his elec-



tion to office that some five thousand stranded Mennonite refugees in Moscow hoped to find their way to western Canada, immediately announced to the public that they would not be received in Saskatchewan.

The president of the Colonization Board made strenuous efforts, both in the provincial capitals and in Ottawa in behalf of the Moscow unfortunates but without success. The Dominion Government would not have offered any serious objection to the admission of the immigrants, but hesitated to oppose the wishes of the western provinces. Manitoba finally agreed to accept two hundred families on condition that their friends and relatives guarantee their support if necessary. The Canadian Pacific also was willing to finance their transportation. But Saskatchewan and Alberta were determined in their opposition. And so, only about one thousand souls were admitted during the year. A few hundred more the following year practically ended the Mennonite immigration to Canada. By this time about 21,000 Mennonites had entered Canada, and had been distributed throughout the various parts of the Dominion.

### **Transportation Difficulties**

That the transportation of these thousands of helpless immigrants from Russia to Canada, and their final settlement on permanent country homes of their own was beset with many hardships goes without saying. The Canadian quarantine regulations were strict. Hundreds of refugees were held up for periods of indefinite lengths at Riga, Southampton, Hamburg, Quebec and other detention camps, because of sore eyes, or other physical ailments; all at the expense of the Colonization Board. Even after their arrival in Canada the sick had to be cared for at considerable cost in local hospitals.

The rapid accumulation of the transportation debt to the railroad company also became a cause of increasing anxiety, though it must be said to the credit of the Canadian Pacific that even as the debt piled up the company seemed willing at all times to enter into new contracts for bringing over more colonists, convinced that in the end Mennonite integrity and honesty would ultimately liquidate all their obligations.

The vast majority of these refugees took their obligations seriously, and in spite of hard times and lean years did all that could be expected of them toward the liquidation of their honest debts. But there were some who too soon forgot the debt of gratitude they owed their Canadian brethren, the Canadian Government, and the railroad company for delivering them from the Russian terror. In nearly all the meetings held by the immigrant groups in which they discussed their common problems, this transportation debt question had an important place on the program. C. F. Klassen, himself an immigrant, was finally appointed as the special representative to collect money from the immigrants to repay this obligation. When David Toews died in 1947 he had lived to witness the entire repayment to the Canadian Pacific Railway of the debt amounting to nearly \$2,000,000.

After they found that the contract made by the Colonization Board did not legally bind them to assume the financial burden of the enterprise, the opposition of many of the older churches also gradually melted away; and before the immigration movement had gotten well under way nearly all of these churches including all the branches of the denomination on both sides of the international boundary line, supported the work wholeheartedly and generously with money, clothing, and supplies.

## Settlement on the Land

What to do with these refugees permanently after their arrival here was an equally perplexing problem. The original agreement with the Dominion Government was that the newcomers should settle on the land. Since nearly all of them had been farmers in Russia, this seemed a logical arrangement. Canada, still having plenty of available land for settlement presented many possibilities.

One of these possibilities seemingly was to be found in the large selection of well-improved farms of the Old Colonists and Sommerfelder of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, who, just at this time were finding their way to Mexico and Paraguay in large numbers. These farms were for sale at fairly reasonable prices, and on rather easy terms of payment. At the same time, too, a number of gentleman farmers along the western frontiers, finding large-scale farming decidedly unprofitable during the depression years, were willing to turn over their farms fully equipped with livestock and farm tools, to any group of industrious Mennonites who would agree to repay the owners over a course of years with an annual share of the crops raised. Here and there homestead lands were still available also, though rather far removed from the railroads and markets; and some railroad lands, too, along the fringes of civilization.

Unfortunately, most of these first fine promises ended in disappointment. Only a small part of the new immigrants were able to locate on the lands of the Old Colonists. The experiment of farming the large estates, too, as a community enterprise usually ended in failure. A few of the farmers continued as individual operators on small portions of these estates, but community farming for which they had neither experience nor inclination, was entirely abandoned. Most of the land had been

contracted for at too high a price, from thirty to forty dollars per acre. The prolonged period of crop failures and the low prices, caused many of the settlers in a few years to give up their contracts. Some succeeded in having their agreements modified; others left farming entirely and found their way for the time being into the various cities nearby in the hope of finding some other means of making a living. Ultimately most of them found their way on the land again on more favorable terms.

To protect the newcomers from the land speculators, who are always sure to prey on such occasions upon unsuspecting foreigners, a special board was organized, largely upon the suggestion of the Canadian Pacific Railway Company, consisting of several members appointed by the company, and others representing the Mennonite group. This board was called the *Mennonite Land Settlement Board*, and worked in close cooperation with the Colonization Board. This organization supervised most of the settlements made by the immigrants; helping them, all told to nearly a million acres of land; practically all on long term credit, of course, to be paid from a share of the crops raised.

Most of the immigrants located in the western provinces, though a number also remained in Ontario near the settlements of the Old Mennonites. Many of these latter at first found work in the factories of Kitchener, Waterloo and surrounding towns. About one thousand in course of time located on small farms as tenants or purchasers on credit in the southwestern corner of Essex county where the native farmers, lacking farm labor because of their close proximity to Detroit, gladly welcomed these country-minded Mennonite laborers and possible purchasers. A small colony was also established on homesteads in the woodpulp regions of northern Ontario some miles beyond North Bay.

Although the newcomers tried as much as possible to locate in compact settlements, as had been their custom in Russia, that was not always possible here. Today these original twenty-one thousand immigrants and their children are distributed throughout 300 different settlements ranging all the way from half a dozen families to settlements such as near Coaldale in the southwestern corner of Alberta and in the Fraser Valley of British Columbia.

Many of the young women, too, about one thousand at one time, had little difficulty in finding work in domestic service in the western cities, thus greatly helping out the family budget, and making possible the liquidation of the transportation debt.

### **Cultural Life**

Being a devoutly religious people, these Russian Mennonites were deeply concerned that their children should be brought up in their traditional beliefs and practises, both in the home and school. That is one reason why they wished to settle in compact communities, large enough to form effective and vital school and church units. In every settlement, wherever possible, the first institution to be established after the home was the church, then the school. For the Mennonites in Russia had always been firmly convinced that the school was a vital agency in the cultivation of their religious principles. Religion was not a mere theory among them, but a very vital part of the whole of life. God was very near to them; and worship an essential experience. One of the immigrant trains on its way west stopped for ten minutes at a small way station in Ontario one Sunday morning in 1923 for a change of engines; the leader of the immigrant group asked permission to conduct a brief worship service on the station platform during the interval. A short Scripture reading, a brief prayer, several familiar German



hymns by the large concourse of devout worshippers, and the train moved on westward. But the brief scene was not without its effect on the small crowd of native Canadians who had come down to the station to witness this unusual spectacle. "If that is the kind of immigrants they are bringing over here," said one of the bystanders, the local Presbyterian pastor, "we have nothing to fear. We need more like them."

Since the new arrivals included an unusually large number of both preachers and teachers, churches and schools were rapidly organized. Up to 1949 nearly two hundred church buildings had been erected.

About three-fifths of the Mennonites coming from Russia belonged to the Mennonite church and about two-fifths to the Mennonite Brethren and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren. The latter two have joined the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America while the Mennonites (in Russia *Allgemeine Bundes-Konferenz der Mennoniten*) have joined the Conference of Mennonites of Canada, which is affiliated with the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America.

Bible schools seemed especially popular, twenty-two of which were existing in 1948, in addition to ten high schools and two Bible colleges. The growth of these schools is the result, no doubt, of the desire to give young people the religious training which the public schools dare not offer; but partly due, too, likely to a surplus of preachers and teachers who plied this trade in Russia and found it difficult to discover any other means of livelihood, here. Both of the Mennonite schools at Gretna and Rosthern were greatly revived, if not altogether saved, by a large influx of immigrant students. In the Mennonite settlements of the Fraser Valley in British Columbia numerous elementary and secondary Mennonite

schools have been established. In 1943 the Mennonite Brethren established a Mennonite Brethren Bible College at Winnipeg, while the Conference of Mennonites of Canada founded the Canadian Mennonite Bible College in 1947, also in Winnipeg. The interest in higher education among the Mennonites of Canada is increasing continually. Many of them are participating in the cultural, educational, and health programs of their country. Their music festivals are known all over and are highly endorsed by Canadian education officials.

In 1924 D. H. Epp founded *Der Bote*, a weekly paper which in 1948 was merged with *Christlicher Bundesbote* and is now the official General Conference German publication. The *Mennonitische Rundschau*, formerly published by the Mennonite Publishing House, Scottdale, is now being published by the Christian Press, Winnipeg. This establishment has become the official publishing house of the Mennonite Brethren. Among the numerous periodical publications of the Canadian Mennonites the *Mennonitische Warte* (1935-38), published and edited by Arnold Dyck, should be mentioned. The *Echo Verlag* is publishing a series of books pertaining to the Russo-Canadian culture and history. Nowhere have Mennonites, with the possible exception of those in Holland, ever been as productive in the field of literature and art as the Mennonites who have settled in Canada after World War I. Arnold Dyck, J. H. Janzen, P. J. Klassen, Peter Epp, J. P. Klassen and others have made outstanding contributions in cultural areas. Some of the intellectual leaders have found their way into institutions of learning, both in the United States and Canada.

### Hospitals and Homes

In Russia, it was seen, the Mennonite settlements formed not only independent religious bodies, but inde-

pendent economic and social units as well. The Mennonites took care of their own sick, their own poor, and their own dependents and delinquents. They desired as far as possible to do the same here. Up to date they have erected in Canada five hospitals in the larger settlements. For the purpose of furnishing a wholesome social atmosphere for the thousand or more girls who were engaged in domestic service in the larger cities, a number of girls' homes or social centers were established in Winnipeg, Calgary, Vancouver, Saskatoon and several other cities. These homes, no doubt, have not only greatly added to the social life of the girls but have also been vital factors in the preservation of their religious faith during these trying transitional stages. Several itinerant ministers also have been supported in their visits to the various scattered settlements. They have also established a number of homes for the aged and institutions for the mentally ill.

### **The German Language**

Linguistically and culturally, of course, the Russian Mennonites were German, in spite of the fact that they had lived in Russia for nearly one hundred and fifty years; and German is still the language of worship and social intercourse among them. Living as they do in compact areas, they will be able to perpetuate their German culture for some years to come, and perhaps retard somewhat the rapid trend that had set in toward the use of English among the earlier Russian immigrants of the seventies of the past century. Unlike the Old Colonists, however, who had left Canada for Mexico and Paraguay because they did not wish to send their children to English schools, these late immigrants on the contrary are anxious, and perfectly willing to learn the language of their adopted country; and seem to have no scruples against

sending their children to the public schools, though they are still committed to the necessity of adding religion as a subject of instruction somewhere in the system.

### **Non-resistance**

In their attitude toward war service, the late immigrants are inclined to assume a somewhat more liberal policy than did their brethren of the earlier period in the seventies. The latter, it will be remembered, left Russia because they could take no part whatsoever in war, or war preparation, not even in such non-combatant services as Red Cross in times of war, or forestry work in times of peace. The former, the descendants of such as remained in Russia at that time, satisfied with the substitute service offered by the Russian Government, are more liberal than the early immigrants toward all forms of so-called non-combatant war activities. During the first World War, the Mennonites of Russia did valuable service as complete Red Cross units under their own control, though under government supervision, and in the war department. The descendants of the immigrants to Canada, on the other hand, were granted complete military exemption during World War I by the Canadian Government.

When the National Resources Mobilization Act was passed in 1940, representatives of all Canadian Mennonite groups approached the government in the interest of the conscientious objectors. First they were told that the only alternative for the Mennonites would be non-combatant service. The conservative Manitoba Mennonites asked for complete exemption, basing their appeal on the Order in Council of 1873. They were offered a choice between non-combatant or hospital service in the army and work in parks or on roads under civilian supervision.

In 1941 the government informed the conscientious objectors that they were to serve for four months in alternative service camps operated by the Department of Mines and Resources. This period of service was later extended for the duration of the war. During this year the first camp was opened in Ontario. In 1942 forestry camps were opened in British Columbia. In 1943 there were nineteen camps in British Columbia, five in Alberta, two in Saskatchewan, two in Ontario, and one in Manitoba. The Dominion Government paid \$2.50 per day per man of which amount the camper received fifty cents and the rest was used for maintenance (board, lodging, medical attention).

In 1943 the Alternative Service System was transferred to the Ministry of Labor which opened the way for the use of conscientious objectors on farms and factories thus gradually decreasing the number of forestry camps. In these individual assignments current wages were paid of which a large proportion was turned over to the Canadian Red Cross. At the end of the war over 5,000 Mennonite young men of Canada had served in camps or in other areas of service. Many preferred to serve in the medical corps as non-combatants, as well as in regular service. Their number is unknown.

### **Helping Hands**

The migration of some twenty odd thousand Mennonite refugees from the terrors of Russia, where every possible obstacle was set against their escape, to the Canadian prairies where at first, too, an Order in Council still barred their entrance, is an epic in Mennonite annals almost unsurpassed anywhere in all history. The successful accomplishment of this task under these trying conditions required the most skillful leadership, the closest cooperation of thousands of kind-hearted Mennonites



on both sides of the international boundary line; the most sympathetic support of liberal-minded Canadian public officials; and the generous assistance of the Canadian Pacific Railroad Company, without whose timely help the project would have been impossible.

Lack of space here permits the mention of only a few of the outstanding men of the large number who gave unstintingly of their time and talents in the prosecution of this long and tedious rescue work. Among these should be mentioned H. H. Ewert of Gretna, educational leader of the Canadian Mennonites, and one of the first to urge that the task of rescuing their Russian brethren be undertaken, but who unfortunately died before the work had been finished; H. A. Neufeld of Herbert, Saskatchewan, an original member of the committee sent to Ottawa in the interests of the repeal of the Order in Council barring the entrance of Mennonites; P. H. Wiebe of Steinbach, Manitoba, of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite; and three members of the Old Mennonite branch, S. F. Coffman of Vineland, Ontario, E. S. Hallman, and A. S. Bowman, both of Guernsey, Saskatchewan. The Mennonite Central Committee and other relief agencies of the United States were organized in response of the Macedonian call of their brethren in Russia. As they had been active in feeding the hungry in Russia so they also helped in the migration and re-settlement of the Russian Mennonites in Canada.

But special credit must be given to David Toews of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, who remained the chief promoter of the movement throughout the entire period, and was the guiding spirit in every phase of the work. He was president of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, later also president of the Mennonite Land Settlement Board; and in course of time an official member of nearly every organization that had

anything to do with the welfare of the Russian immigrants. For fully twenty years David Toews spent the best part of his life, and gave generously of his time and energies without remuneration above his meager expenses in behalf of the welfare of his Russian brethren. A quiet, patient, determined, deeply religious man, himself a victim in his childhood of the ill-fated Asiatic Khiva expedition in the eighties of the past century, and soon after an immigrant to Kansas, he was well qualified by both experience as well as temperament to head up what at first seemed a lost cause, and to most men would have seemed an impossible task. His heart went out to his suffering Mennonite brethren; and he left nothing stand in the way of bringing them effective help. When the Canadian Pacific Railway Company demanded as a condition to the bringing over of the first group of Mennonites the signing of an impossible contract, Toews signed it; when the Mennonite churches in western Canada and some of the Mennonite periodicals openly discouraged the whole immigration movement, he almost single-handedly carried on the enterprise, patiently hoping that those opposing would soon change their minds—and they did. When the Canadian Pacific again later complained that the immigrants that had been brought over were in arrears in their payments of their passage money, he entreated the delinquents at every opportunity to do their best to meet these obligations, but at the same time entered into further agreements with the company to bring over still larger contingents and assume larger obligations. He travelled extensively in both Canada and the United States collecting money and clothing for the sick and the needy; and repeatedly visited Ottawa as well as the provincial capitals as new needs demanded. And all this for twenty years without a thought of adequate recompense above living expenses, but with the satisfaction of know-

ing that a great humanitarian task had been well done. In years to come the children's children of these refugees will have repeated occasions for remembering with the deepest gratitude the name of David Toews.

## MEXICO

It seems rather strange that while Canada seemed a promised land to the Russian Mennonites seeking escape from the red terror, to another group of native Canadian Mennonites it was regarded as a land of oppression, all because they regarded the German language as an integral part of their religious faith. The one could not exist without the other, this group thought. And so when the Canadian Government insisted that all the Mennonite children attend the English public schools where German was not to be taught, a certain portion of the more conservative elements decided upon another trek from liberal Canada where German was proscribed, to illiberal Mexico where German was tolerated.

### Old Colonists

The delegation of Old Colonists from Manitoba which visited Mexico in 1921, in the interests of a mass migration arrived in Mexico at a rather opportune time. The request for such special privileges as exemption from military service, complete religious toleration, control of their own schools conducted in a foreign language, and land available for large and compact closed settlements could be obtained only from a country that was unusually anxious to secure industrious farmers, and at the same time had sufficient uncultivated soil on which to locate them. The Mexican Government at this particular time was in a position to meet all these demands.

While no special laws were passed to meet these demands of the prospective colonists, the delegation was

assured by President Obregon that all their requests were fully covered in the Constitution of 1917, and the prevailing laws of the country. The Mennonites, he said, need have no fear whatever that they would be restricted in their religious freedom. This assurance of President Obregon's might have been received with a little less of faith by a delegation a bit better versed in Mexican current history than were the Old Colonists: for at this very time the government of Mexico was engaged in a bitter struggle against the Catholic church, and had closed all the church doors, forbidden the priests to perform their clerical functions, and had banned all foreign clergy. It was understood, of course, that this crusade was against the state church, and would not seriously affect the non-Catholic free churches. But it was not a hopeful sign for the future at the best.

Military service also, the delegation was told, was on a voluntary basis; and the laws respecting local government and schools, with the exception of the Catholic schools, were quite liberal. Neither was there any restriction against the use of any foreign language either in the church or schools. Court procedure did not demand an oath. Mere affirmation was sufficient. In other words, the Constitution and the liberal laws of Mexico, the delegates were told, already provided all the guarantees they desired without the necessity of special legislation.

Land, too, could be had, either government land or private estates, at reasonable prices and in unlimited quantities. Much of the land in Mexico at this time was still held by speculators both native and foreign, in the form of large estates. The actual farmers, peons so called, mostly Indians and half-breeds, lived in a state of serfdom, huddled together in small villages, in crude one-room adobe huts, completely at the mercy of the absentee land

lord, and with little hope of bettering their condition. Much of the soil was still uncultivated.

The new land policy of the government called for the liquidation of all these large estates and their redistribution among the actual tillers of the soil. For this reason the government was anxious to settle the hitherto waste areas with industrious farmers like the Mennonites who might serve in a way as model farmers to the less thrifty and efficient native peons. Many of these estates had already fallen into the hands of the government; and the remaining private owners of large haciendas were eager to unload.

Two large Mennonite colonies were established in Mexico, one, the largest one, about fifty miles west of the city of Chihuahua in the state of the same name; the other, near the city of Durango, in the state of Durango. From 1922, when the first Canadians arrived, until 1926, about five thousand Old Colonists, and nearly another thousand of Sommerfelders from Manitoba and Saskatchewan had located in these two colonies. During this time some forty long train loads of passengers, with live stock, farm equipment, and household utensils crossed the Rio Grande from the north, into the land of the cactus and the eagle where they purchased a number of large estates, counting up well toward a half million acres of land at a price of nearly four million dollars, mostly in cash, though the colonists had some difficulty in disposing of their Canadian farms for ready cash during the depression years.

Both of these groups brought with them and transplanted on Mexican soil all their traditional conservative social and economic institutions and religious practises. They reproduced as nearly as possible the kind of life they had left in Canada. They formed themselves into some forty village groups of from twenty to forty fam-





Old Colony Children in Mexico

ilies each as their forefathers had done on the steppes of South Russia and on the prairies of Manitoba. Even the village names were reproduced — *Rosenort*, *Steinbach*, *Schönwiese*, etc.; although the names once descriptive of the beautiful meadows or flower gardens of South Russia did not quite fit the sandy cactus fields of central Mexico. In both colonies the land consisted of a high plateau, more than a mile above sea level, almost within the tropics, semi-arid, only a small fraction of which was under cultivation, the remainder being grazing land or still the haunt of the rattlesnake and desert vegetation.

The beginning of course was hard. But it is marvelous what Mennonite industry and thrift and modern farming methods can do in a few years. In a remarkably short time what had once been an uninhabited and desolate stretch of sand and cactus had been transformed into a series of some forty prosperous villages, surrounded by fields of wheat and corn, and green pastures dotted with fine herds of Canadian livestock. The natives marvelled at the superior products from the Mennonite farms and herds; and soon learned to discriminate between native and Mennonite stock in the market places. A scrawny Arkansas razor-back could easily be recognized as a native; but the sleek, well-fed porkers that found their way to the markets in Durango and Chihuahua were soon designated as "Mennonite" hogs; and the healthy-looking cows as "Mennonite" cows. The government officials, too, in their tours of inspection expressed themselves well-pleased with what the Mennonites had accomplished in so short a time, although they were somewhat disappointed at what they called the exclusiveness of the Old Colonists, who, living in large compact settlements, and refusing to mingle socially or economically with the natives, did not have the influence as model farmers which the governmental officials had hoped for. The native

Mexican villages near the Mennonite settlement all greatly benefitted, however, from the prosperity of the Mennonites. The little village of Cuauhtemoc, just at the edge of the Mennonite colony in Chihuahua, which had consisted of only a few poor families in 1921 had grown by 1949 into a prosperous up-to-date city of nearly eight thousand.

### **The Russian Contingent**

Meanwhile, there seemed to be a fair possibility about this time of securing the influx of a large body of Mennonites from Russia. Although the Russian delegation of 1920 had passed Mexico by as a possible home for prospective Mennonite refugees, yet a certain amount of interest remained for the Republic to the south among the Mennonites of Russia as well as certain Mennonite groups in the United States. The telegram of B. B. Janz to Newton, Kansas, requesting that arrangements be made with the Canadian Pacific Steamship Company for the transportation of ten thousand Russians to Mexico has already been mentioned. In the meantime, in 1921, another Mennonite Colonization Society had been formed among a number of men, of whom H. P. Krehbiel was the chief promoter. Its objective was to further the Mexican project.

The Mexican government, too, especially the officials in the land and railway departments, were greatly interested in the proposed migration, and the officials of the Kansas colonization society were given liberal passes over the railroad company lines for inspecting suitable sites for settlement. At a meeting held in Newton, in 1924, of officials of the Mexican Government, the colonization society, and certain New York financiers, a rather elaborate scheme was worked out for financing a mass immigration movement. According to this proposed

scheme the New York financiers were to finance the enterprise by issuing six percent bonds, endorsed by reliable American Mennonite individuals, and then countersigned by the prospective Russian immigrants. The Mexican Government was to furnish transportation from the Mexican seacoast at Vera Cruz to the homes selected in the interior. This ambitious plan was never carried out; for a number of reasons, but chiefly no doubt because of the difficulty of finding the Mennonite endorsers. Between 1924 and 1926 several hundred stragglers arrived in small groups at Vera Cruz, usually penniless, and sometimes unheralded, and found their way into the interior where they formed several settlements on available haciendas which they purchased on long-term contracts.

The largest of these settlements was located near the city of Irapuato in the state of Guanajuato. All these small Mennonite colonies from Russia had to be supported by the Newton colonization society during their stay in Mexico. Unable to meet their payments, and dissatisfied with their prospects here, most of them finally found their way to Canada. A few remained, however. These latter drifted for the most part into the city of Cuauhtemoc, on the outskirts of the Old Colony settlement, where in 1938 H. P. Krehbiel of Newton, organized them into a small congregation, now affiliated with the General Conference of North America. Among the leaders in this small group are David Redekop and his sons who have succeeded in building industries and stores through which they purchase the produce of the Mennonite settlements and in turn supply them with groceries, dry goods, machinery, and whatever a Mennonite farmer in Mexico may need. The Redekop industries include dairy, cheese, and packing plants.

Neither the Kansas society nor any of the other American Mennonite relief agencies took much interest



in the affairs of the Canadian Old Colonist enterprise in Mexico. These were able to finance themselves and needed no outside help. Religiously, too, they were well organized, and too conservative in their beliefs and practises to accept any spiritual ministration outside their own group. Although they suffered considerable economic hardship during the early years, their church and school privileges were fairly well respected during these years of political disturbance.

The Old Colony Mennonites have established new villages for the second generation of their group in Mexico. The members of the *Kleine Gemeinde*, who migrated to Mexico from Manitoba during the years 1948-49, have established a settlement north of the Old Colony area. They have already built churches and schools and are establishing themselves.

### Anxious Days

But during the early thirties the new socialist government, forgetting the promises of Obregon to the delegation of 1921, began to apply their socialization program to the Mennonite schools as well as to those of the natives; and demanded that native Mexican teachers replace those of the Mennonite faith. For some months the Mennonite schools were closed. It was just for this that the colonists had left Canada—loss of control over their own schools. Once more there was talk of another trek, even back to Canada if no other place opened up. Several hundred did return between 1936 and 1938.

At the same time Mexican bandits, taking advantage of the pacificism of the Mennonites, frequently broke into their homes, and even attacked them in their homes or on their way to the markets. Several Mennonites had already been killed in these encounters. When the Mexican Government learned that the Mennonites were



seriously considering leaving the country, they decided to intervene in their behalf. After all, the government did not wish to see the flourishing villages and well-cultivated fields of some ten thousand Mennonites revert back to the barren deserts they once had been. And so, in 1936, president Cardenas promised the Mennonites again all their school privileges and added police protection against banditry. The schools were again opened; robbery and banditry ceased for a time; the plans for a wholesale exodus were given up.

### Population Growth

At the close of World War II the MCC established a public health service in the city of Cuauhtemoc, while the Home Mission Board of the General Conference has supported the work of the General Conference church in Cuauhtemoc. In 1946 the population of the Old Colony Mennonites was 12,673, of the Sommerfelder 600, of the Church of God in Christ 65, and of the General Conference 50. In 1948-49 some 700 members of the *Kleine Gemeinde* moved to Mexico.

## PARAGUAY

### The Menno Colony

Not all of the conservative Canadian Mennonites who proposed to emigrate, favored Mexico as a future home. Some of the Sommerfelder as well as members of the Bergthal and Chortitza groups, considering the political and social conditions in Mexico too uncertain to justify removal to that country, preferred to risk South America as the goal of their colonization project. A delegation of six, consequently, representing these three groups left Canada in February, 1921, on a tour of inspection through Paraguay, where in the Gran Chaco region they had been

told there was plenty of good land to be had in any quantity desired; and where the Paraguayan Government was ready to grant all their requests for religious and political freedom, including control of their own schools in their own language.

After an extended visit into the heart of the Chaco, several hundred miles west of Puerto Casado, a landing place on the Paraguay River, well within the tropics, which happened to fall within the best season of the year, southern autumn, when the light rains and the cool nights made life in the tropics comfortable, the deputies returned home some months later with a favorable report on the promised land; and a charter of privileges passed for their benefit by the Paraguayan Congress, granting them all they asked for:—religious toleration, military exemption, control of their schools, local political rule, entrance into Paraguay of farm implements and household utensils free of charge for a limited time, and entrance of immigrants without medical examination.

This report was alluring to the prospective emigrants. Many were impatient to start immediately, and might have done so but for one hurdle in the way. It was not an easy matter to find a ready sale for several hundred farms all at once except at a great sacrifice. Even before the return of the deputies, the leaders of the movement had contacted a New York financier by the name of Samuel McRoberts who had agreed to an exchange of Canadian farms for raw land in the Chaco. McRoberts, in turn, had been in consultation with the Paraguayan minister at Washington, Dr. Eusebia Ayola, regarding the Paraguayan angle of the deal. But before this arrangement could be carried out the great depression of 1922 and the years following swept across the country, carrying farm prices down to such unprecedented levels

that the New York promoter withdrew his offer. It was not renewed until 1925.

### **Financing the Project**

To carry out the project now, in 1925, McRoberts and his associates formed two stock companies—the *Intercontinental Company* (I.C.) with headquarters at Winnipeg; and the *Corporation Paraguay* (C. P.) with headquarters at Asuncion. The I. C. agreed to buy all the land of the Canadians, some forty-four thousand acres, for the sum of nine hundred thousand dollars, pay the owner seven dollars per acre in cash, and exchange the rest through the C. P. for one hundred and thirty-eight thousand acres in the Paraguayan Chaco, at the rate of about five dollars per acre—land for which the Corporation had paid one dollar and twenty-five cents a short time before to the Casado heirs, who had vast holdings in this area since 1885.

The first transport of three hundred and nine emigrants left Altona, Manitoba, November 23, 1926; and a month later at Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay, were welcomed to their new home by the Paraguayan president, the same Dr. Ayola who several years before, as minister to Washington, had taken such an interest in the proposed migration. Great was the disappointment, however, of the Canadian immigrants as a few days later, they were unloaded at Puerto Casado, some distance up the Paraguay River, from which port they were to find their way to the Chaco.

### **Early Disappointments**

No preparation had been made for their reception by the C. P. except the erection of several crude wooden

sheds for their temporary stay; and even these were still in the making. The land they were to occupy as homes had not yet been located, nor even surveyed. They had left their Canadian homes in the beginning of winter, to arrive below the equator in the torrid zone, in the hottest season of the year, southern midsummer. There were few signs of human habitation for miles. Even Puerto Casado, the river port was hardly more than a loading wharf for the products of the quebracho acid industry located here by the Casado interests. To the west, in the direction of their future homes in the Chaco, there wasn't a single white inhabitant for hundreds of miles; only a few bands of roving Indians without permanent homes, as raw and uncivilized as were the North American Indians at the time Columbus discovered the continent; innumerable foxes, a few jaguars, poisonous snakes, a plenteous supply of parrots, myriads of grasshoppers, mosquitoes and other pestiferous insects, gigantic ant hills, ten feet in diameter and three and four feet high, and an occasional troupe of monkeys.

Even the heavens above seemed strange. Instead of the big dipper high in the northern sky, there was the southern cross never seen in their northern homes. The sun overhead was to the north instead of to the south as they had been used to seeing it. This was a strange new world into which these immigrants had wandered in search of religious freedom.

For more than a year there seemed little concern on the part of the C. P. to survey the land. In the meantime, other transports kept disembarking throughout the year at Puerto Casado, until over seventeen hundred disillusioned colonists had been crowded into the barracks and improvised shelters near by. Many of these now, becoming increasingly impatient with the crowded conditions at the port of entry, and anxious to make their

way toward their permanent homes, following the little narrow-gauge railroad and the ox cart trail toward the Chaco, located in small groups here and there along the way in temporary shelters, awaiting the allotment of their permanent homes farther on.

It is not strange that under these crowded conditions, and lack of ordinary sanitary arrangements and proper food, and under radical climatic changes, and no medical advice, disease epidemics should claim their toll of human life. Like all pioneer American colonial ventures, this one, too, had its dying time. First, the children took sick and died; then adults, until by the end of the first year one hundred and forty-seven of the colonists had succumbed to their hardships. Before the land was surveyed, and the first village established two hundred lonely graves marked the ox cart trail from the river harbor to the later settlements in the Chaco.

### **First Settlements Made**

It was not until the spring of 1928 that the survey of the colony was finally completed, and the first village, *Bergthal*, was permanently located. Of course many of these disillusioned home-seekers lost their courage through this long period of delay. Some were homesick and longed for the pleasant fields and familiar sights of Manitoba. Several families during the period found their way to the capital city, Asuncion; others started a new settlement farther down the river near Villarrica; about three hundred and fifty souls had the courage to return to Canada. But these latter, too, met with added disappointment on their return. Their former Canadian homes were now occupied by strangers; their Chaco farms, not yet surveyed, were unsaleable, and consequently for them valueless. Their ready cash had been used up in the heavy transportation expenses to and from South America.



Many had left Manitoba and Saskatchewan several years before fairly prosperous, only to return empty handed, thoroughly convinced, no doubt, that they had paid a rather high price for the unsuccessful attempt to save their heritage.

### **The Chaco a Vast Plain**

The Gran Chaco is a vast stretch of virgin land lying between the Pilcomayo and the Paraguay rivers in the heart of the tropics on the Bolivian-Paraguayan frontier, uncharted, and until recently, uninhabited by any white man. It is for the most part without adequate drainage; wet and cool in winter, but hot and dry in summer; and consequently with a soil that is inclined to be salty. It is covered with a dense growth of underbrush, with occasional clusters of big tropical hardwoods, and interspersed here and there with open spaces of a tall bitter native grass that is good for thatching roofs, but not for feeding livestock.

In the heart of this wilderness, about one hundred and forty miles straight west from Puerto Casado, and about fifty by ox cart trail from the nearest terminus of the little narrow-gauge railway that connects it with the river port, the Corporation Paraguay located the Mennonite tract of about one hundred eighty square miles, which the settlers called *Menno*. The original village, *Bergthal*, just mentioned, was now soon followed by seventeen others, distributed throughout the open grass spaces of the land area. Following the early Russian and Canadian Mennonite traditions, and perhaps also necessity in part, the settlers grouped themselves into villages of from fifteen to twenty families each. The average farm was from eighty to two hundred acres in size, thirty acres of which consisted of a household plot within the village itself; the remainder being allotted as conveniently as

possible from the outlying open grass or woodland. Home ties were kept alive by christening these new villages after their well-known Canadian predecessors—*Reinland*, *Chortitza*, *Schönthal*, *Steinbach*, etc. *Laubenheim* evidently was native.

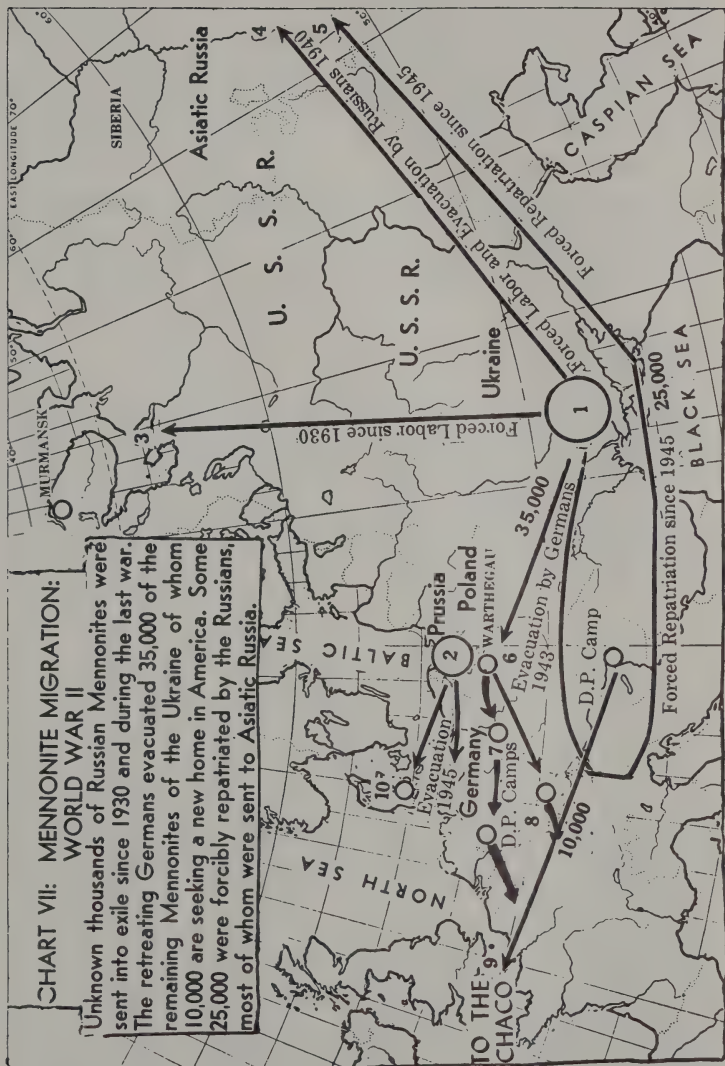
### Fernheim

A second colony, Fernheim, which consists of some forty thousand acres bordering the northwestern boundaries of the Menno tract, was settled by such of the Moscow refugees, as were unable for one reason or another to gain admission to Canada, and did not volunteer for Brazil. The American Mennonite Central Committee, it will be remembered, took special interest in the plight of these Moscow refugees from the start. The committee preferred Paraguay to Brazil as a possible home for several reasons—a successful Canadian Mennonite colony had already been established here, and further because of the liberal terms, and especially military exemption, which the Paraguayan Government had guaranteed prospective Mennonite immigrants.

The first contingent of this Moscow group which left their temporary barracks in Germany on March 15, 1930, were welcomed at Asuncion as had been their Canadian brethren before them, a month later by another Paraguayan president, and finally reached the terminus of the Puerto Casado railway, where they were met by their Canadian brethren from Menno, to be transported in big two-wheeled ox carts to the Corporation camp which had been prepared for them on the outskirts of their proposed colony. Here they soon established themselves into villages of from fifteen to twenty families each, much after the fashion of their earlier Menno brethren. Other groups during the year brought the total number of arrivals up to fifteen hundred. In 1932, three hundred seventy-eight

## CHART VII: MENNONITE MIGRATION: WORLD WAR II

Unknown thousands of Russian Mennonites were sent into exile since 1930 and during the last war. The retreating Germans evacuated 35,000 of the remaining Mennonites of the Ukraine of whom 10,000 are seeking a new home in America. Some 25,000 were forcibly repatriated by the Russians, most of whom were sent to Asiatic Russia.



of the Harbin exiles joined the colony. These, together with a small company of Mennonites from Poland who had also found their way here, brought the whole number of immigrants to this settlement to about two thousand. Perhaps, because they were homesick, the first settlers called their colony *Fernheim*; and their individual villages, too, eighteen of them, repeated familiar names from the homeland—*Lichtfelde*, *Orloff*, *Rosenort*, etc. *Hiebertsheim* commemorated one of their American benefactors, and *Auhagen*, their German friend in Moscow.

### Hardships

Both of these colonies, *Menno* and *Fernheim*, the former less than the latter, experienced hardships almost unbearable from the start. Hundreds of miles from markets and sources of supplies, with no transportation facilities other than the ox cart, with no money or tools, heavily in debt for all their land, no improvements of any kind, the *Fernheim* colony especially had to start from scratch, practically empty-handed. Their first homes, tools, farms and farm equipment and all the essential elements of their economic life they had to create from nothing. Their first makeshift houses were without floors or ceiling, with thatched roofs made of the native bitter grass, or perhaps of discarded galvanized sheet iron; windows without glass admitted an invasion of flies, mosquitoes, and all the pestiferous insects that infest a hot, swampy, and salty wilderness; the furniture was all homemade from the hardwoods near by. Almost the first concern of the settlers was the search for fresh water. Numerous wells were dug, but most of them contained only salt and bitter water. The finding of a fresh, or "sweet" water well was the source of great rejoicing. Some of the villages were forced to carry the

water for both their stock and themselves for miles from the supply of more fortunate neighboring villages.

The intense summer heat, too, with occasional dust storms from the Argentinian north, and periodical droughts just when the growing crops needed moisture most often, bore heavily on the physical stamina of the colonists.

Familiar crops like wheat and certain highly prized garden vegetables refused to grow in the tropical Chaco. The lack of white bread remained a major complaint for some years among the more particular. Kaffir corn bread, they said, made good chicken feed, but was not particularly palatable for humans, especially those from the Canadian and Russian wheat fields. It was some years before it was found that such crops as kaffir corn, peanuts, beans, cotton, and even watermelons could be grown with some success and fair profit. Too often even when growing crops gave promise of a good harvest, either a prolonged drought, or a sudden swarm of grasshoppers in a few days would blast all the cherished hopes of better times ahead.

It was to be expected, of course, that under these conditions, all of which tended to undermine the physical stamina of the early settlers, and in the absence of doctors and medical supplies, disease should make its inroad among them. Like their neighbors at Menno, the Fernheimers also had their period of mourning. Eighty-eight new graves, scattered throughout the village cemeteries, gave mute evidence of the disease ravages during the first year.

Naturally, these disappointments and hardships caused a good deal of homesickness among the faint-hearted, and developed a desire among them to seek a better location if possible. Unlike the Canadian brethren, of course, the Fernheimers could not return home, for



they had no home land to go to, but they might seek a more suitable place in Paraguay; and some of them did. For a time it seemed that the entire Fernheim colony might leave. By 1939 about one-third of the colony had left for other locations, some for the larger cities, but most of them for a new settlement in eastern Paraguay, near Rosario, in a new colony which they called *Friesland*, after the native land of the founder of their faith, Menno Simons.

Gradually the situation improved somewhat, and living conditions became more tolerable. Year by year a little more land was cleared; living quarters became a little more comfortable; kiln-dried brick in a few places replaced the original adobe huts; fresh water wells were discovered in increasing numbers; cotton, it was discovered, could be cultivated with considerable success; and it has become the chief cash crop, though the government's policy of money inflation, and the distance to market made the net profits still disappointingly small. Labor-saving machinery, too, though crude and home-made, lightened somewhat the burdens of the farmer. A crude threshing machine run by a gasoline engine replaced the old hand flail; a cotton gin, an oil press, a kaffir corn flour mill, and other machinery was gradually introduced. Horses and mules gradually replaced the slow moving and stubborn oxen as the chief beasts of burden. The breeding of cattle and hogs, and raising of chickens has increased both the quality and quantity of food, and health conditions have improved as a result.

The destructive forces of nature, however, unfortunately have not shown a similar trend. The ravenous grasshoppers, the ubiquitous ants and flees, the tropical sun, droughts and dust storms have continued their devastating visits unabated.

In fact, it is extremely doubtful whether any other

people than these pious and industrious Mennonites, overjoyed at their escape from a living death in Red Russia, and no other prospect for a future home than the Chaco wilderness, would have been able or willing to endure these hardships. They were willing to face any trial and undergo any distress if only their religious faith and the spiritual welfare of their children could be spared. So great was their gratitude for having escaped this danger in Russia that they set apart November 25, the day they left Moscow, as a special annual day of thanksgiving for their deliverance.

## Indians

The small bands of Indians that roved about the underbrush of the Chaco were not a threat to the Mennonite colonists. They were peaceful and harmless; and in the early days, before they knew the value of money, they were of great help in clearing the underbrush from the first farms, being used by both the colonies for that purpose. The Fernheim Mennonites, supported by their Canadian brethren, especially the Mennonite Brethren, have conducted mission work among the Indians almost from the beginning of the settlement. Among the many things which the Indians are learning from the Mennonites is the Low German language.

## The Chaco War

The Bolivian-Paraguayan War, too, was fought during this period, sometimes not far from the Mennonite settlements. The roar of cannon was often heard in the villages, and soldiers frequently passed through the streets. With the exception of a few tragedies, the colonists were not seriously molested. One of the Menno settlers was shot while attempting to protect his daughter against an attack by a Paraguayan soldier; a Bolivian aviator,

flying low over Philadelphia, one time, emptied his machine gun into the town hall, but did no serious damage. On the contrary, the army camps nearby often furnished a welcome market for eggs and other supplies produced by the colonists, who were eager to exchange these articles for a little ready cash. In the main, pleasant relations were maintained between the army and both colonies. Occasionally a wounded soldier would be brought into the local hospital. Fernheim was presented with a captured Bolivian gasoline truck by the commanding officer of the Paraguayan army for hospital service. The Mennonites, on the other hand, one Christmas day, presented the soldiers with a liberal supply of cookies, pastries and other Christmas delicacies.

### **Help from the M. C. C.**

The American Mennonite Central Committee, it will be remembered, took a special interest in the Fernheim colony, though they had little part in the promotion of the Menno settlement or of the Brazilian venture. All these settlements, however, were visited by different members of the committee at various times in the interest of their general welfare.

The financial arrangements between Fernheim and the Corporation Paraguay during most of this time were especially unsatisfactory. In the early years much of the local equipment needed by the settlers, and supplies were bought through the Corporation at rather exorbitant prices. The price paid for the land also was too high, and payments could not be met. For a time foreclosure threatened the colony. Finally, in 1938, the M. C. C. bought out the interests of the Corporation at a greatly reduced price; and made new contracts with the farmers at a figure which they could meet; and thus the financial future of the colony was assured again for a time.

## Local Government

The charter granted the Mennonites by the Paraguayan Government, as seen elsewhere, permitted a wide degree of freedom in the selection of such forms of local government, and such an educational program as suited their needs, and satisfied their religious convictions. After several unsatisfactory experiments, the Fernheim group adopted a form of local control that was based somewhat upon that known to their early Russian forefathers. At the head of the colony is a superintendent called *Oberschulze*, elected by a general assembly of all the villages, aided by several assistants and a clerk. This superintendent is granted considerable arbitrary power. Each village, too, has a local magistrate called a *Schulze*, together with a village clerk, and peace officer.

There is also an independent court system, consisting of a central peace office located at the headquarters of the colony, and local justices of peace in each village. Village peace officials are selected by the *Oberschulze* from a list prepared by the local village town meeting. This type of government, it will be observed, is a sort of compromise between a pure democracy and a rather arbitrary rule of a highly centralized superintendent. In fact this arbitrary assumption of power by the central authorities was one of the contributing factors to the heavy emigration of the Fernheimer to Friesland several years ago. This independent and privileged position of the Mennonites within the framework of the Paraguayan Government accords them almost the status of a state within a state; and so long as they remain isolated in the Chaco wilderness, several hundred miles from the nearest civilized frontier outpost, they likely will not be molested by the Paraguayan authorities in the control of their local domestic affairs.

The conservative Canadians in Menno, more suspicious of worldly government, and less open to the introduction of new experiments, adopted a simpler form of local rule, which was also less independent of religious authority. Before they left Canada they had selected a committee, *Fürsorge Komitee*, representing the three different groups making up the colony, to direct all the business affairs of the whole company. This committee has never been discharged, and still directs all of their material affairs, serving without pay, as do their preachers and other public servants. All questions of general interest are decided in a general meeting of the whole colony. Necessary discipline is administered by the elders and ministers. The Menno group does not recognize a special non-religious system. They make very little distinction between worldly and spiritual rule.

Both colonies, continuing the practises of their Canadian and Russian ancestors, supply their own fire and livestock insurance companies, children's homes and hospitals. The primitive conditions of their settlements, and their common needs demanded for a time a number of cooperative business enterprises. Fernheim early established a cooperative store, cooperative mills and other necessary undertakings. The cooperative spirit pervading the whole life of the colony is well expressed in a large wall motto hanging above the front stage of the town hall—*Gemeinnutz vor Eigennutz*—(Public Welfare above Self-interest).

In the Fernheim colony all these enterprises, together with the local government offices, the high school, industrial plants, mills, cotton gins, and the printing press, were centrally located in a town especially built to be the headquarters for the entire settlement. This town, built on a tract of land consisting of two hundred and fifty



acres specially donated for that purpose by the Corporation Paraguay, was called *Philadelphia*.

## Schools

To both settlements, control of their schools continued to be a major interest. To the Fernheim colony, especially, the re-education of their children was a matter of grave concern, since they had already been subjected in Russia to ten years of the blighting influences of the atheistic ideals of communist teachers.

Fortunately, there were a number of efficient teachers among the Russian immigrants. The first crude building to be erected in every village after living quarters had been provided for was the primitive little school hut, without furniture or school equipment, and for a time without school books. The curriculum, however, was up-to-date and varied, stressing especially German, with some history, nature study, mathematics, as well as singing and religion. The native tongue was not neglected. The second year a number of teachers spent some time, at government expense, at Asuncion to learn the language of the land. After 1935 a *Zentralschule* was erected at Philadelphia. Fritz Kheuer was sent to Germany, with some support from the over-seas German Institute at Stuttgart, for a three-year course of study to prepare for the principalship of this high school. A general school board has supervision of the educational system of the colony. In course of time teacher's associations, and teacher's institutes were established.

Thus far, Fernheim. The Canadian brethren, though they, too, stress the need of perpetuating their religious and social ideals through their school system, yet their educational ideals are not of a high order. They perhaps have learned nothing of educational methods or ideals

since their forefathers left their Prussian homes for South Russia more than a century ago. Every suggestion of a worldly influence is tabooed: worldly textbooks on science, history and even mathematics. The only books permitted in the schoolroom are the primer, catechism, and the Bible. The direct purpose of the school is to teach the child to read, write, to cipher a bit, but not too much, and to sing. School attendance is compulsory and there is no illiteracy among the folks in Menno. Teachers, ill-prepared for their work usually, divide their time between farming and teaching, serving with very little pay.

School methods, in Menno, imported no doubt from their ancestral homes generations ago, are standardized. A few samples of the daily routine may not be out of order here. A typical school day in Menno begins with song and prayer after which the children recite in sing-song fashion a long poem of twenty-three stanzas of four verses each. The first three go as follows:

*Das erste was Du thust  
Wenn Du erwachest früh  
Sei ein Gebet zu Gott,  
Kind, das versäume nie.*

*Dann stehe schleunig auf  
Und biete guten Morgen  
Den Eltern, die für Dich  
Mit treuer Liebe sorgen.*

*Dann wasch und reinige Dich  
Zieh ordentlich Dich an;  
Unreinlich darfst Du nie  
Dich Deinem Lehrer nahn.*

The forenoon closes with a recital of the books of the Bible, arranged in rhyme, somewhat after the fashion of the old New England primer. The first of five stanzas reads as follows:

*In des alten Bundes Schriften  
Merke in der ersten Stell'  
Mose, Josua, und Richter  
Ruth, und zwei von Samuel,  
Zwei der Könige, Chronik, Esra  
Nehemia und Ester mit  
Hiob, Psalter, dann die Sprüche  
Prediger und Hohelied.*

In the afternoon session, after song and prayer, the children in unison repeat the multiplication table, closing the school day by counting up to 100 forward and backward. The next day and many days following, this program is repeated without variation.

## Religion

In Fernheim all three of the prevailing branches of the Russian Mennonite church are represented—the Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren, and the Evangelical Mennonites, though the latter compose only a small contingent. Realizing the need, however, of cooperation in their religious as well as in their economic life in the midst of their primitive surroundings, these three groups have united their forces through a *Kommission für Kirchenangelegenheiten* (KfK) in all their religious efforts except in their baptismal and communion exercises. The Mennonite Brethren, being strict immersionists, do not admit members from the non-immersionist branches to either membership or fellowship around the communion table without rebaptism.

Mission festivals, choral singing, Bible conferences, evangelistic meetings, observance of the various church holy days play an important role in the religious life of the Chaco refugees, especially among the Mennonite Brethren, as they did in Russia. The colony is well blessed with preachers.

The youth problem has given the Fernheim leaders no little concern at times. The ten years of Bolshevik influence in Russia were not without influence even on Mennonite youth. Disrespect for their elders, loose ideals of social conduct, liberal thinking in matters of religious faith—all these influences tended to threaten the harmony of the churches. Under the guidance of Fritz Kliewer, the high school teacher, and other progressive leaders, a youth organization was formed, with branches in various villages, which by sponsoring music festivals, Bible study, and dramatic performances, gradually directed the activities of some of the unruly youth into higher levels of social life.

In the Menno colony the three different groups that left Canada finally united into one ecclesiastical body. Being very conservative in their religious practises as in everything else, they brought with them into the Chaco all the traditions to which they had been accustomed in their home land. They tolerate no choral singing in their worship; but each congregation retains several *Vorsänger* who lead the worshippers in old time hymns, sung slowly and in unison. Prayer is carried on in silence, the worshippers kneeling. Preachers read their sermons from manuscript not of their own composition. The seven preachers of Menno compared with the fifty-four in Fernheim is not to be regarded as indicative of less religious zeal on the part of the former, but rather as evidence that among the latter persecution under Russian communism was especially directed against the religious leaders.

## Arrivals after World War II

The plight of the Russian Mennonites who found themselves in western Europe at the close of World War II will be recalled from the chapter on Russia. Some twelve thousand Mennonites from Russia found them-

selves as displaced persons in the British and American zones of occupied Germany and in Berlin. It was most urgent to rescue the refugees in Berlin since they were in danger of being forcibly repatriated to Russia, which was the fate of thousands of Mennonites caught in the Russian zone of Germany. After careful preparation, the Russian authorities finally agreed to permit the 1,125 Mennonite refugees to proceed from Berlin to Bremerhaven by train. Peter and Elfrieda Dyck, representatives of the MCC, were instrumental in taking this group to Bremerhaven, where the *Volendam* received other Mennonite refugee passengers, making a total of 2,305. On February 1, 1947, they departed for Paraguay, arriving in Buenos Aires on February 22. The transportation of this group to Para-



Mennonite Refugee Women On Their Way to Paraguay



guay was delayed because of a revolution in that land. About half of this group settled in the new colony *Volendam*, west of the Friesland colony and bordering the Paraguay River. The next largest group established a new colony south of the Fernheim colony in the Chaco. The total cost to the MCC of moving these immigrants was \$494,807, of which the International Refugee Organization contributed \$160,000. This was the first of a number of shiploads of Mennonite refugees transported to Paraguay.

On March 13, 1948, the *General Stuart Heintzelman* arrived in Buenos Aires with 860 refugees aboard and on May 16, 1948 the *SS Charlton Monarch* left Bremerhaven with 758 refugee passengers. The *Volendam* again left Bremerhaven on October 7, 1948 with 827 refugees destined for Paraguay. This ship stopped in Montevideo, October 22, disembarking 751 Prussian Mennonite refugees for their destination in Uruguay.

In 1946 the Menno colony, founded by Mennonites coming from Canada, had a population of about 2,900, Fernheim about 2,100, and Friesland 1,000. With the arrival of nearly five thousand Mennonite refugees the total population of the colonies in Paraguay almost reached twelve thousand in 1949. After the establishment of the new colony Volendam, the later refugees were directed mostly to the Fernheim-Menno colonies where they settled on newly-purchased land.

## BRAZIL

About one-fourth of the Moscow refugees who had been temporarily housed in the German military barracks decided to accept the German offer of free transportation to Santa Catharina in southern Brazil where, near Blumenau, a flourishing German city of some five thousand, a

large German colony, established some hundred years earlier. Near here the Hanseatic Colonization Society, founded some years before to promote German colonization in Brazil, still had a large area of unoccupied primitive forest land on the western fringe of the German settlement, for which it desired settlers. It was with this society that the Mennonites contracted for their land, at a rather high price, but on the installment plan.

The land selected was located just below the tropics, in the foothills along the *Alto Rio Krauel*, a tributary of the Itajahi, which in turn flows eastward into the Atlantic. Although only one hundred and fifty miles from the coast, and forty from the nearest railway, this was still a primeval forest of sub-tropical hardwoods, and a tangled mass of underbrush. The nearest town of any size, Blumenau, was one hundred miles distant seaward.

The first group of Mennonite colonists, consisting of one hundred and eighty persons, aided by the German Government with transportation expenses on credit, and by the German Red Cross with necessary household utensils, left Hamburg under the leadership of Heinrich Martens, on a German liner in mid-winter of 1930; and reached their Brazilian destination in southern mid-summer, about a month later. Other transports followed during the succeeding months, until by the end of the year nearly one thousand Mennonite refugees had reached the wilderness along the Krauel, eager to begin life all over again with practically nothing of this world's goods except a financial obligation that would doom them to a life of toil for many years to come. In 1934 several hundred of the Harbin refugees found their way to the Brazil colony.

Two separate settlements were established. The first comers located along the *Krauel*, the later arrivals, finding the Krauel Valley already well-filled, were forced

rather reluctantly to move some miles inland upon an elevated plateau about twenty-five hundred feet above sea level, called *Stoltz-Plateau*. The Krauel settlement was divided into three districts respectively, *Witmarsum*, which ultimately became the headquarters for the whole group; *Waldheim*, and *Gnadenthal*. The Stoltz-Plateau group named their settlement *Auhagen*, after the German official who was of great service to the Moscow refugees in the flight from Russia to Germany.

Unlike the Russian Mennonites elsewhere, these Brazilians did not congregate in villages, but each family located on its own farm tract of one hundred acres, more or less. This was due perhaps partly to the difficulty of clearing enough of the woodland immediately for village sites. They kept the usual form of local government, however, with the *Schulze*, the *Oberschulze*, and other local officials, as had been their custom in Russia.

### Early Hardships

Like their Paraguayan brethren, the Mennonites along the Krauel, too, passed through a period of great disappointment and disillusionment, and almost despair at times. Coming as they did from the broad wheat-fields of Siberia, where their labor at least was lightened by the use of immense horse-drawn harvesters, they found that here in the Brazilian jungles their first task was to clear by axe and saw enough of a lot on which to erect their first rude log huts; then by further hand labor to extend the clearing for sufficient room in which to plant the beans, sweet potatoes, or kaffir corn with which to feed themselves. It would take years of hard work before sufficient land would be cleared to even raise enough food for a modest living, and a full generation before they could pay off their debts. Of a marketable product there seemed none except *aipim*, a root plant strong in starch

content; but so long as they were far from market, and without a starch factory, aipim could not be grown with profit. In course of time, however, it became the chief cash crop. The excess of moisture also, and the tropical sun encouraged the growth of rank weeds and underbrush almost as fast as it could be cleared, greatly adding to the farmer's labor. Farming thus by hand with spade and hoe, instead of horse-drawn machinery, was of the most primitive nature.

There were several encouraging factors in the situation, however. The climate, though tropical, yet, especially on the plateau, was not unbearable; and health conditions remained fairly good. There was no dying time as in Paraguay. The colonists received substantial financial aid, too, from their Dutch brethren, who made the Brazilian venture their special charge. Through S. H. N. Gorter, chairman of the Dutch Emigration Bureau, substantial sums of money were sent to the settlers for the purchase of livestock, for the establishing of schools, the erection of a starch factory, which made possible the marketing of the aipim products, and for other needed purposes. In course of time, too, more land was cleared, better houses were built, and more roads opened; cooperative stores, mills, factories and creameries were established. During the first year the Mennonites from Witmarsum organized a co-operative to include every family. This co-operative operated a sawmill, a flour mill, and two stores. The Dutch Mennonites supported this enterprise. The co-operative grew to a creditable business concern and greatly helped the settlement in its early trying years.

Naturally these hard living conditions in the original settlements drove a number of the settlers to look for more favorable locations elsewhere in which to establish permanent homes. Many of the younger people soon found their way into the larger coast cities, into domestic

service, or into factory work and clerical positions. Parents frequently followed their children. By 1935 a mass movement had begun, especially from the Auhagen settlement for a new location near *Curitiba*, a city some distance to the north, which threatened for a time to depopulate all Auhagen. As it was, only some thirty families remained. In 1946 the population of the Curitiba group numbered some two hundred and fifty families, living mostly in the suburbs of the city and outlying districts. The milk industry, especially, has become popular among the Mennonites. Three-fourths of all the milk for the city of Curitiba, which has a population of 125,000, is being supplied by the Mennonites. Other Mennonites are employed in factories and business places. A comparatively high percentage have their own business or workshop, woodworking heading the list of crafts being followed.

### Church and School

Here, too, all three of the branches of the church were represented, with the Mennonite Brethren in the lead numerically. Although retaining their separate divisional organization and church fellowship yet the three groups have united under a *Kommission für Kirchenangelegenheiten* (KfK) for safeguarding their common religious and cultural interests, and frequently for common worship. Each settlement, too, showed the usual concern for maintaining an efficient school system. In 1933 a *Zentralschule* was established at Witmarsum, the so-called county seat.

Unlike the Paraguayan and Mexican colonies, the Brazilian Mennonites, as noted elsewhere, were not offered any special concessions by the Brazilian Government as an inducement to their settlement here—no mil-



itary exemption, no local political control, and no promises of a free school system. At first, they were permitted considerable liberty in conducting their own schools in their own German language; but during World War II a governmental decree demanded that in all schools the language of instruction was to be Portuguese and the teachers had to be native born. This handicapped the Mennonite educational system very much. They had many well-trained teachers who were born in Russia and who now had to stop teaching. The children had to be sent to the public school or minority schools, such as a Catholic private school in Curitiba. Even the worship services in the German language were prohibited. This was a special hardship for the Mennonites from Russia who did not know Portuguese, not to speak of expressing religious feelings in this language. Some Portuguese was used for worship service, but somehow the Mennonites convinced the government officials that Low German was not the German language. They were granted the permission to conduct their worship services in the Low German language. Songs and other means of worship had to be translated into the Low German, a unique chapter in Mennonite history.

In 1949 the first Brazilian born Mennonite young men became of military age. They were exempted from military service, an action based on the new Constitution of 1946. This was an occasion of great joy for the Brazilian Mennonites.

The Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren have held their services together at both places, Curitiba and Witmarsum. Only the monthly meetings for communion and business were held separately. New church buildings have been erected. The Mennonites of Brazil were represented at the Mennonite World Conference, held in the United States in 1948. Two congregations of Witmar-

sum and one congregation from Curitiba joined the General Conference of Mennonites of North America at its session in Berne, Indiana, 1947.

The Mennonites in Brazil are confronting great problems. They are small groups surrounded by a Latin-Catholic environment. They long for more fellowship with their like-minded brethren abroad. This need has been partly met through contacts with the Mennonite Central Committee, conference representatives from North America, and contacts with the Mennonites in South America.

In 1932 Peter Klassen founded a German paper called *Die Brücke*, devoted to the religious and cultural interests of the colony. Owing to lack of support, and especially to the governmental demand that translations of the paper be also made in the Portuguese language, the venture unfortunately had to suspend in 1938.

Since 1954 *Bibel und Pflug* is being published in Brazil for the Mennonites of South America. The first editor was Fritz Kliever. In 1949 the Mennonite Brethren of Witmarsum established a new settlement near Bage, known as *Colonia Novo*. By 1951 the settlement consisted of seventy-seven families or a total of 365 persons. The remaining Mennonites of Witmarsum established New Witmarsum in the province of Parana in 1951. By 1954 seventy-four families consisting of 438 persons had moved there. In addition to dairying, the Mennonites raise vegetables and fruit. A secondary school is being maintained in New Witmarsum.

## XV

### CULTURE AND PROGRESS

The American Mennonites, it will be observed, are not a homogeneous and united group, with a single ecclesiastical organization. They came from widely scattered sections of Europe, at various times, with different social backgrounds. These social differences, transplanted to a pioneer society in America, intensified or still further differentiated, perhaps, by settling in isolated communities here, subjected occasionally to the uncertainties of an arbitrary leadership and the disintegrating influences of a loosely organized form of congregational government—all these account for the twenty odd varieties of Mennonitism found this side of the Atlantic.

Like the Puritans of New England, however, the Mennonites, too, in a way have been a sifted people, sifted on the basis of a tender conscience against religious intolerance, political autocracy, and especially against the iniquities of the war system. The most conscientious, perhaps the most hard pressed economically, the younger element frequently came to America. Although held together by the common bond of all the fundamental beliefs of orthodox Mennonitism, they have been separated by inconsequential, though irreconcilable details of social and religious practise.

For purposes of convenience all these different branches of the church may be roughly arranged into three broad groups—*Conservatives*, *Progressives* and *Moderates*, remembering, however, that all are still nominally conservative in their theology, and true to the

teaching of Menno Simons, including his views on baptism upon confession of faith, rejection of the oath, non-resistance, together with anti-secrecy and perhaps several other principles not particularly stressed by Menno, though no doubt implied in his general religious system.

### **Conservatives, Progressives, and Moderates**

Under the head of *Conservatives* might be listed the following distinct branches—Old Order Amish, Wisler Mennonites, Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, Old Colonists (Canada and Mexico), *Kleine Gemeinde*, Hutterites (not always classed with Mennonites), Reformed Mennonites, and several other small unnamed divisions. The total population, including children, of this group is approximately fifty thousand. All these are still inclined to insist on various rigid dress regulations—bonnets, prayer-head coverings, aprons for the women, plain coats and simple clothes for the men with slight variations as to particular cut, a tendency toward broad-brimmed hats, and hooks and eyes among the Amish; beards among both the Amish and the Holdemans, but smooth-shaven faces among the Wisler Mennonites; boots for the ministers among the Old Colonists. Proscribed among most are mixed marriages, even with members of related branches, schooling beyond the elementary grades, religious affiliation with any other church, holding of public office, and in many cases taking part in elections; in some cases Sunday schools, mission enterprises, and evangelistic services. The Amish have no meetinghouses. All these branches still make frequent use of the church ban and the practise of avoidance; also foot washing. Preachers of course are untrained, unsalaried, and chosen by lot.

The so-called *Progressives* with a total population of perhaps one hundred and twenty thousand, include the General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North

America, the Central Conference, the United Missionary Church, and most of the recent immigrants from Russia to South America and Canada. The General Conference embraces about seventy-five thousand of the total population of the group. This group has discarded practically all dress regulations, the ban against mixed marriages, and the holding of public office, though they are still officially non-resistant on the question of war. They favor a salaried and educated ministry. The General Conference supports several colleges and numerous secondary schools. The United Missionary Church is the most evangelistic in the group, and has grown more through non-Mennonite converts than any other branch of the church. The whole group affiliates more freely than any of the rest with other denominations, the General Conference, as already suggested, having been a member of the Federal Council of Churches for a time.

Among the *Moderates*, which embrace a total population of about one hundred and fifty thousand, are included the Old Mennonites, comprising nearly two-thirds of the entire group, Mennonite Brethren (Russian), Amish-Conservative, Evangelical Mennonite Church (formerly Defenseless), Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, Sommerfelder, and several other small Canadian groups, and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren (formerly *Bruderthaler*). All these may be regarded as occupying a middle ground between the conservative and progressive groups in their religious practises. Most of them still discourage extravagance, and conformity to changing fashions in dress, though not so strict as the conservatives. The Old Mennonites officially prescribe the bonnet, and in Pennsylvania the cape for the women, and the prayer-head covering, though they are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain some regulations, especially among the young people. The Evangelical Mennonites do not insist



on dress restrictions. All practise foot washing, though avoidance has been discarded. Few have a salaried or specially trained ministry, though there is a growing tendency to demand of their ministers a certain degree of special training and a growing realization that a certain amount of material support is necessary. All are generous in their support of missions. Office holding in general is discouraged, but most of them exercise the right of suffrage. All favor higher education for their young people. The Old Mennonites support Goshen College, and several junior colleges. The Mennonite Brethren sponsor Tabor College. The other branches in this group are too small to have schools of their own, but they send their young people to the schools of the other branches.

The above total Mennonite population of over three hundred thousand, includes all the Americas—the United States, Canada, Mexico and South America.

### **Early Confessions of Faith**

The essential doctrinal unity of the American Mennonites is evidenced by the adoption of common confessions of faith. All the conservatives and most of the moderates have agreed upon the conservative Dordrecht confession which, in addition to the commonly accepted Mennonite doctrines, includes the practise of shunning, or avoiding all those who have been excommunicated from the church in "eating or drinking or other such like social matters," in order, so says the confession, "not to become defiled by intercourse with him and become partakers of his sin," and also "that he may be made ashamed," under the mistaken notion that by this method the "ashamed" sinner may again be drawn back into the fold. As just stated, however, this article of the Dordrecht confession is no longer observed except by the

conservative group. This confession also prescribes foot washing; and marriage only "in the Lord," which among such as still follow this statement, is interpreted to mean only with another member of the same branch of the church.

This Dordrecht statement of Mennonite principles which had been officially approved by the Alsatian and Palatine Mennonites in 1660, before the Amish separation, was printed by the Pennsylvania Mennonites on the Bradford press in Philadelphia as early as 1727, and was the very first Mennonite book to be printed in America, and strange to say in English. It has been frequently reprinted since, and universally accepted by the groups above mentioned.

The more liberal Cornelis Ris confession, translated into German from the Dutch in 1849, by C. J. van der Smissen, the Wadsworth professor, but at the former date pastor of the Mennonite church at Friedrichstadt, Germany, was published in English in 1902, by the General Conference, and became the accepted statement of the Mennonite faith of the more tolerant group. Of course some of the immigrants of the middle nineteenth century also favored other confessions. The Cornelis Ris statement agrees with that of Dordrecht in the fundamentals, though differing somewhat in non-essential details. It is slightly more philosophical and tolerant than the latter. It is silent on foot washing and shunning. Marriage with "unbelievers" is forbidden as is divorce, except on scriptural grounds.

### **Church Government**

In their church government the Mennonites are strictly congregational, with a decided inclination, however, among the large compact settlements of the Old Mennonites in southeastern Pennsylvania to group a

number of congregations into bishop's districts under a bishop who assumes considerable ecclesiastical authority within his district. The United Missionary Church too, has adopted a church polity somewhat semi-episcopal in form, with presiding elders in control of definite jurisdictions. But in general among all the other branches, and most completely in the case of the General Conference branch the congregations are entirely independent, choose their own ministers and regulate their own affairs. Conferences have only advisory powers, with no disciplinary control over either members or congregations, except to exclude from Conference membership in case of serious disagreement. In the General Conference a two-thirds vote of all the membership is required to vote out a member congregation.

Among the conservatives and most of the moderates the ministers are chosen from the congregation, usually by lot, without previous preparation, conviction, consent, or qualifications, for life and without material remuneration. The method of selection does not vary much in different congregations. In the Franconia Conference among the Old Mennonites, on the appointed day of the selection, such candidates as are thought worthy of the ministry by a vote of the congregation, stand before the pulpit desk upon which are placed as many books of uniform appearance, usually hymn books, as there are candidates. Into each book a slip of paper has been placed, one of which contains the fateful passage from Proverbs "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposal thereof is of the Lord." The recipient of this paper slip must then preach the rest of his days whether qualified or not; and except for gross misdemeanor the congregation has no recourse but to listen to him. Since he is the Lord's choice there is no backing down for either preacher or congregation. If perchance it is absolutely impossible for

the minister thus chosen to serve his people in preaching he must retain his office and perform such minor duties as his limited capacities afford. The lot may be cast again among a new set of candidates in the hope that providence, if given another chance, may be more successful.

The progressive wing of the denomination, of course, has long ago outgrown this ancient Mennonite method of choosing its ministers, and there is a very strong movement also among most of the moderates in the same direction.

### **Sense of Otherworldliness**

The first Mennonite immigrants to America, both the Pennsylvanians, as well as the later Swiss, and the Russians in Kansas and Manitoba brought with them from their ancestors the traditional Mennonite sense of otherworldliness and suspicion of the ruling authorities. Although no longer persecuted here as in Europe, yet their life in compact isolated communities, as well as their non-resistant principles which forbade their taking of human life in maintaining a stable social order, tended to keep them out of politics here.

With the exception of an unsuccessful experiment among the rather liberal Crefelders in Germantown, the early Mennonites never held office, nor participated in political affairs even where they were in the majority. Although rural Lancaster county was first settled almost solidly by Mennonites, yet the political subdivisions were organized, named and ruled by the small number of English and Scotch-Irish who had moved in among the Mennonites. The only Mennonite names, or even German names one finds are those of small way stations in honor of some nearby farmer, Eby's Post Office, Herrville, Witmer station, Neffsville, etc.

The Mennonites in the west tried to retain at first as much as possible of the local political freedom which they had enjoyed in their home land, in Manitoba even being allowed for a good many years the control of their schools and considerable leeway in the handling of their local civil affairs.

To this day both the conservatives and the moderates still oppose the holding of public office by their members, with the exception of such local positions as school director or road overseer. Most of the moderates, however, make free use of the right to vote. Most progressives have little objection to the holding of office except such as might compel them to enforce capital punishment.

With the exception of the conservatives, the objection to office holding does not include affiliation with the political parties which elect the officers. While the Mennonites may differ in their party affiliations in various sections of the country, in any given area they are likely to be of the same political faith. The Pennsylvanians, like their fellow Germans and the Quakers, joined the Republican party largely, no doubt, because of the attitude of that party toward slavery and rebellion. The Mennonites settling on the western plains under the liberal land laws passed by the Republicans, also joined that party. The Swiss in Ohio and Indiana, on the other hand, arriving on the frontier during the days of Andrew Jackson, became Democrats. The children and grandchildren of all these have remained true to the political faith of their fathers. Most of us inherit both our religion and our politics. The Mennonites in Canada have usually voted for the Liberal candidates because that party, especially since World War I, has been more sympathetic toward their interests than has the Conservative party.



The Mennonites in America have retained to a large extent the traditional emphasis of the early Mennonites on right living as an essential part of true religion—the virtues especially of honesty, integrity, simplicity, truthfulness, genuine trustworthiness and a high moral standard of family life. Divorce in this land of hasty marriage and easy separation is almost unheard of among the Mennonites.

### German Language and Culture

Linguistically and culturally the Mennonities in America, with the exception of a small group of Dutch in Germantown and another near Elkhart, Indiana, have been Germans, whether they came direct from the Palatinate, Switzerland, France, Prussia or Russia. The Pennsylvanians were German-Swiss who had lived for a time in the Palatinate, or in southeastern France. The Russians came originally from Holland, but through a residence of two centuries in Prussia they had absorbed a German culture which another hundred years in Russia could not wear off. Pennsylvania "Dutch" remained for nearly two centuries the common means of social intercourse among the Pennsylvania Mennonites; and some form of high German the language of the pulpit. Among these, German as a language has just passed, with the exception of the Old Order Amish among whom an English sermon would be just as much out of place as buttons, or short hair.

Among the Mennonites of the prairie states the use of the German language in worship belongs to the past. In compact communities, such as Goessel, Buhler, and Moundridge, the Low German and Swiss, respectively, are still being used in daily conversation. In 1948 a Low German play, *Dee Fria*, by Arnold Dyck, was given five times to a total audience of some two thousand

people. Some have even learned to read Low German stories, such as *Koop enn Bua*. Low German is a dialect which the Mennonites adopted in Prussia from where it was taken to Russia. This is a sample.

### PLAUTDIETSCH

J. H. Janzen

*Maunch eena kaun keen Plautdietsch mea  
en schämt sich nich emaul.*

*Em Geagindeel: he meent sich sea  
met siene hoage School,  
red't hoogdietsch, englich, rusch—so vül  
daut eenim dieslich woat.*

*Weat es de gaunze Klätamähl  
nich eene Schinkeschwoat.*

*Auls eck noch kleen wea, saut eck oft  
bi Mutt're oppim Schoot,  
en plautdietsch säd se, — o so oft; —  
"Mien Jung, eck sie die goot."*

*Waut Mutta plautdietsch to mî säd,  
daut klung so woarm en tru,  
daut eck daüt nimmamea vegät  
bat to de latzte Ruh.*

Of all Mennonite groups in the prairie provinces in Canada, those of the 1870's and the immigrants who came to Canada after World War I and II, both High and Low German are still the chief means of communication. Some High German is still being used among the Russian Mennonites of the United States while the Hutterites still cling to their own dialect.

The picturesque Pennsylvania "Dutch" is basically the Palatine dialect of the early eighteenth century with the admixture of an occasional English word that for one reason or another was drafted into the vernacular. Pastorius himself was one of the first to yield to the tempta-

tion of mixing the two tongues. In a letter written to the Frankfort Land Company in Germany, he attributed his inability to protect the interests of his company against rival claimants with these words, *Ich fand das alle Lawyers gefeed waren.*

Generally the English words are much fewer than supposed however, as this popular poem in the vernacular indicates.

### DIE NEIE SORT DSCHENT'LEIT

*O heert, ihr lieuwe Leit, was sin des Zeite:*

*Das unser eens noch dess erlewe musz  
'Neder Bauerbuh musz Kaerridsch reide,  
Un Baure-Maed, die schleppe rum in Seide  
Un Niemand nimmt an all dem Schtolz Verdrusz.*

*'N eegne Boghie hot en jeder Bauerbuh*

*'N schrier Gaul un G'scherr mit Silberb'schlege druf,  
Un plenti Zehregeld ah im Sack—, do is kee Ruh,  
Amm Samschdag gehn die Dschent'leit 'm Schted'l zu  
Und schtelle dort am deirschte Wertshaus uf.*

*Der Vater denkt, Was hab ich schmaerte Sehne,  
Die Mutter sagt, Mei Maed die kumme raus,  
So Schteil koscht Geld. Ja well, m'r kann jo lehne.  
Sell geht'n Weil, bass uf, du werschtes ball sehne,  
Der Vatter "geht d'r Bungert Fens ball 'naus."*

*Vor Alters war es als en Sinn un Schand,  
Meh Schulde mache as m'r zahle kann;  
'Sis net meh so: m'r gebt juscht Notis dorch die Editors  
Mer het geclos't, un deht cumpounde mit de creditors,  
Wer so betriegt, der is en Dschentlmann.*

*Wie lebt m'r nau? Ich sehn du weescht noch nix,  
M'r lebt juscht wie d'r vor: des fixt die Lah;  
M'r eegent nix—die Fraa hots all in Hand,  
M'r is ihr Edschent, maenedscht Geld un Land;  
Un geht nau in die Koscht bei seiner Fraa.*

With the English words left out this language would not be unintelligible in many parts of the Upper Rhine

today. If a Pennsylvania Mennonite were to stand on a street corner of Heidelberg today and, closing his eyes, listen to the casual conversation of the passerby he might easily think himself back in Allentown. Some years ago the author, in the course of a visit to the Saar region was standing on a village railway platform one evening by a waiting train to return to Saarburg. The engineer and train-dispatcher were engaged in a spirited conversation at the head of the train discussing some matter of procedure, while the impatient conductor was on the rear platform anxious for the discussion to end. *Was is letz?* I asked in what I thought was good Alsatian vernacular. *Wenn sie net bal ufhöre babble*, he said, *komme sie nie hehm*, in words that would make any wandering Pennsylvania Dutchman homesick.

## Education

The leaders among the early Anabaptists and Mennonites were usually learned men—priests, university trained men and sometimes university professors. In course of a few years, however, the leaders were all killed off by persecution, and the rank and file driven under cover. Educated doctors of theology were usually hand in glove with the magistrates in driving the Mennonites to a martyr's stake, or hounding them out of the country. Under such conditions higher training was neither possible nor popular. In lieu of theologians and priests Mennonites depended upon direct access to the Bible for their religious instruction. But to know the Bible it was necessary to read. Sufficient schooling to enable their children to read consequently was universal among the Mennonites. There was far less illiteracy among them than among the average common folk of their day. Their opponents all marvelled at their knowledge of the Bible.

This interest in elementary schooling, the Mennonites

brought with them to Pennsylvania. In Germantown they started a school even before they had a church house. When Pastorius began his subscription school several years later the Mennonites became its chief supporters. Every congregation in colonial Pennsylvania had its local institution of learning supported by the congregation usually and kept sometimes by a pious Mennonite, quite frequently by a wandering schoolmaster not so pious, frequently in a church house, occasionally in a home or a special school building. The best known among these Mennonite pioneer schoolmasters was Christopher Dock who, because he was found dead one evening after school hours kneeling at his desk in the attitude of prayer, has been called the "pious schoolmaster of the Skippack" by one of his admirers.

Being a successful teacher, Dock was invited by Christopher Saur, the well-known Germantown publisher, and a former pupil, to write out his method of teaching for the benefit of other teachers. The modest schoolmaster consented but with the request that the work was not to be published until after his death. This request was honored by the publisher and so the *Schulordnung* which is regarded today as the first work on the art of teaching to be published in America, did not appear in print until 1770, after both Dock and Saur the elder had died.

Like all the Mennonite schools of that day, and perhaps other similar institutions of learning as well, Dock's school paid much attention to religion. The New and Old Testaments were used as texts, and as a basis for the reading and writing exercises. It was the usual "blab" school, that is all the studying was done audibly; and silence during the study period became a misdemeanor, though required during the recitation period by all those not engaged in the recitation. Dock describes in the



*Schulordnung* how he maintains silence during the recitation period—

I walk up and down the room, and when I think they have learned their lesson I order them to be quiet and then appoint a monitor, who has been detailed for this duty. He stands on a bench or other high place where he can see all, and reports the Christian and surname of each one who talks, studies loud, or does anything else that is forbidden.

Dock was a born teacher. Discussing the need of winning the respect of the pupils rather than their fear, he says "I have a great love for children, a grace from God, otherwise it would be a great burden among the scholars."

This *Schulordnung* went through two later editions, but is known today only among the antiquarians and students of the history of colonial education. Dock also wrote a number of poems, and *A Hundred Rules for Children*. Some of these rules are interesting including this one on table manners. *Rule 34*. "The bones, or what remains over, do not throw under the table, do not put them under the tablecloth, but let them lie on the edge of the plate."

When the public school system was introduced into Pennsylvania the Mennonites as well as the other religious denominations fought the movement out of fear that religion would be barred from the curriculum. In course of time, however, the Mennonites in the east all became reconciled to the public school system. Prior to World War II a parochial school movement was launched among the eastern Mennonites. This movement made rapid progress during the war and in 1948 there were thirty-five parochial schools sponsored by the Amish and the Mennonites, mostly in the east, and attended by more than two thousand pupils.

The later immigrants from South Germany and Russia during the past century, were much concerned about keeping control of the education of their children; and most of them for a time supplemented the regular public system with additional parochial schools where religion and German were given a conspicuous place in the curriculum.

In the pioneer settlements along the western frontier where the Russian Mennonites lived in compact school districts, and at a time when the school laws were still quite lenient, they had little difficulty in maintaining such schools as met their needs, giving ample time to both religion and German. But where the Mennonites constituted only a part of the school population, and when the educational requirements demanded by the state became more rigid, the demand for the favorite subjects were satisfied by special church or private schools held during the summer months after the close of the regular public school year, which for some time was rather short. Today the demand, especially since World War I, for German is waning in our own west, though still strong among the Canadian Mennonites; the religious interests are being satisfied by the establishing of a number of local Bible schools throughout various congregations on both sides of the international boundary line.

In Manitoba the Mennonites were granted almost complete control, it will be remembered, over their schools by the provincial and dominion governments at the time of their settlement. But their school experiences are told in another chapter, and no further reference is needed here except to remember that after the war the provincial authorities in both Saskatchewan and Manitoba insisted on the establishing of public schools in all the Mennonite settlements to replace the former church controlled schools, and also upon the exclusive use of the English

language as a means of instruction. German even as a subject of study was to be barred. As already noticed some six or seven thousand of the more conservative Mennonites from the Old Colonists and Sommerfelder preferred another trek to Mexico and Paraguay rather than to give up the use of their German. After World War II another wave of emigrants from the prairie provinces followed their conservative brethren to Mexico and Paraguay.

### Higher Education

In the field of higher education there seemed little of interest among any of the Mennonites until well into the middle of the past century. It was only natural that the progressive wing of the church should be the first to awaken to the need of better training for its young people, especially training for church leadership.

The demand for a church school especially among the Russian and South German churches in the west did not die with Wadsworth, however. Soon after the closing of the Ohio institution the Kansas Conference established a small *Vorbereitungsschule* in the Alexanderwohl congregation near Newton, Kansas, with H. H. Ewert as principal in 1882. The next year a building was erected at Halstead, and the institution was maintained under the same management as a *Fortbildungsschule*. Ewert remained in charge of the institution until 1890 when he was called to head the pioneer educational work among the Mennonites of Manitoba. In 1893, in the meantime the Halstead institution gave way to Bethel College at Newton which was controlled by a voluntary association, but with Conference sanction and support. David Goerz, one of the pioneer immigrants, became the business manager of the college, and from this time until his death in

1914, devoted his best efforts to the educational interests of his people. C. H. Wedel as president of the faculty was made the educational head, which position he held until his death in 1910. Bethel College has made its influence felt strongly throughout the western churches from the beginning, furnishing many of the church leaders and missionaries. Some years ago an attempt was made to bring the school directly under the control of the Western District Conference, but so far this has not been accomplished. Under the efficient presidency of Ed G. Kaufman the College has made rapid progress in recent years; and in 1938 was admitted into membership of the North Central Association of Colleges, the first of the Mennonite institutions to achieve this recognition. The plant facilities of the college were considerably increased in the 1940's and the size of faculty and student body has also grown, particularly in the years immediately following World War II.

The Old Mennonites did not awaken to the need of a church school of higher learning until the beginning of this century, and even then there was very little sentiment in favor of such an institution in the branch of the church mentioned. Goshen College owes its existence to the foresight of a small group of progressive men who realized that young and efficient leadership could be secured and maintained only through an educational institution controlled by the church. In 1895, this group of men formed an association and secured funds for a building at Elkhart, Indiana, for a preparatory and Bible school. This institution called Elkhart Institute, was the outgrowth of a private normal and business school founded several years earlier. In 1902, the school was moved to Goshen and enlarged into a college under the name of Goshen College. This college has already trained most of the foreign missionaries and many of the

younger leaders of the church. In the long list of early leaders in the history of this pioneer institution among the Old Mennonites and former Amish-Mennonites, John S. Coffman, pioneer evangelist, who took a leading part in the founding of the Elkhart school, and was the president of the Board of Trustees until his death in 1899, and Jonas S. Hartzler, who as secretary and treasurer for over twenty years bore the chief financial burden of both schools, which often were exceedingly arduous, have already been mentioned. Noah E. Byers, first as principal of the Elkhart school, and later as president of Goshen College, moulded the early educational policy of the institution during the formative years. Under the presidency of E. E. Miller, Goshen College was admitted to the North Central Association of Colleges. The Bible department of the college has been developed into a theological seminary.

The Mennonite Brethren, as already suggested after co-operating for a few years with the Dunkard college at McPherson, Kansas, in their educational work, founded their own school in 1908, Tabor College, at Hillsboro, Kansas. A fire in 1918 destroyed the entire plant, but a vigorous campaign for funds secured \$100,000 for new equipment. Among the leaders in the founding and early management of Tabor College were H. W. Lohrenz, an early president, and D. E. Harder, secretary, a member of the *Krimmer Mennonite Brethren* who are affiliated with the *Mennonite Brethren* in their educational work. Under the presidency of P. E. Schellenberg, the college experienced a continuous growth.

The Mennonite Brethren in Christ, now United Missionary Church, attempted to found a Bible training school at Elkhart in 1902. A small group of Indiana members secured the Elkhart Institute building in which a school was held for several years, but owing to opposition



and lack of support the work had to be abandoned. In 1947 they opened a school under the name of "Bethel College" at Mishawaka, Indiana.

Bluffton College was originally known as Central Mennonite College, an institution which was founded by the Middle District of the General Conference in 1900, first as an academy but later as a junior college. In 1914 the school was enlarged into a full-fledged senior college and seminary through the cooperation of members from five different branches of the denomination, the Middle and Eastern Districts of the General Conference, the Central Conference, the Defenseless Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren in Christ, and the Old Mennonites. At present only two branches, the Middle and Eastern Districts of the General Conference and the Central Conference are officially represented on the Board of Trustees, although members are unofficially selected from several other groups. The enlarged institution became known as Bluffton College and Mennonite Seminary.

This attempt at a union educational enterprise was largely the result of the efforts among others of two college presidents, S. K. Mosiman, of the Central Mennonite College, and N. E. Byers of Goshen College. The former was retained as the first president of the new college, and the latter as the first dean. J. H. Langenwalter, a former president of Bethel College, the following year became the first dean of the seminary. Bluffton College has served the church and its young people well since its founding, sending out from its halls a number of missionaries, teachers, and leaders in other fields of educational and religious service.\*

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\* C. Henry Smith, the author of this book, taught at the Elkhart Institute from 1898-1900, Goshen College from 1908-1913, and at Bluffton College from 1913-1946. He inspired many young men and women to a better appreciation of their heritage as he continues to do even today through his numerous writings. (The Editor.)

In 1921 the seminary separated from Bluffton College and organized an independent board of trustees drawn from different branches of the church under the name of Witmarsum Theological Seminary. This institution remained located at Bluffton with J. E. Hartzler as president, and P. E. Whitmer as dean. Like Wadsworth, Witmarsum survived a scant ten years, justifying its brief existence, however, by training many of the missionaries and ministers now holding positions of influence in the different branches of the denomination. Unfortunately the seminary was allowed to suspend unnecessarily because its friends did not have the faith nor the sacrificial interest required to keep it alive.

After the Witmarsum Theological Seminary at Bluffton, Ohio, had been closed in 1931, the General Conference at its session in 1938 arranged that the Board of Education, the Executive Committee of the Conference, and the Board of the former Witmarsum Theological Seminary be authorized to work toward the opening of a Bible school and seminary. At the reorganization meeting held at Bluffton, Ohio, a new Board was created. This Board met in Chicago, July 31, 1945, and voted to open the Mennonite Biblical Seminary and the Mennonite Bible School in affiliation with the Bethany Biblical Seminary of the Brethren in Chicago in September, 1945. The new school opened on schedule and A. Warkentin served as president until his death in 1947. The physical plant, the faculty, and the student body have shown a steady growth.

Besides the institutions mentioned above, there are a number of junior colleges and special Bible and preparatory schools, among others Hesston College at Hesston, Kansas, and Eastern Mennonite College in Virginia, both of the Old Mennonites; Freeman College, supported largely by the local congregations of South Dakota and

surrounding churches of the Northern District of the General Conference; and numerous Bible and secondary schools sponsored by local congregations among the western Canadian Russians largely under the heads of *Ver-einsschule*, *Vorbereitungsschule*, Bible school, etc. In 1943 the Grace Bible Institute was founded in Omaha, Nebraska. The Pacific District of the Mennonite Brethren in 1945 opened the Pacific Bible Institute, Fresno, California.

From a study of attendance in 1938 of twenty Mennonite schools, three of which were senior colleges, four junior colleges, and the rest secondary and Bible schools, it was found that in that year there was a total attendance in all these institutions of about three thousand, of which about one-half were found in the senior and junior colleges. In 1948, the total number attending Mennonite schools and colleges was doubled. Out of the six thousand attending Mennonite schools, some five thousand were Mennonites.

## Missions

The cause of missions has always been closely connected with that of higher education. In fact it was for the purpose of training missionaries and other religious workers that the first advanced schools were founded. Missions and education, it will be remembered, were the chief subjects of discussion in the founding of the General Conference of the Mennonite Church in North America in 1860. The General Conference branch of the church was a pioneer among Mennonites in missions as in education, but this story is told in another chapter.

The Mennonite Brethren (Russian), too, early manifested an interest in the cause of missions, both foreign and home. They established their first missionary society in 1885, soon after their organization as an ecclesiastical body in America. At first, because of their close affiliation

with the Baptist denomination both in Russia and America, and because of their paucity of numbers, they supported two native workers in India under the Baptist board, and a few years later another in Africa under the same auspices. In 1894 they also cooperated with the Baptists in work among the American Indians.

By 1899 the Brethren had grown sufficiently in numbers to start their first independent foreign mission in India. Today this branch of the church has missionaries in Africa, China and India as well as in many cities in the homeland.

The United Missionary Church, formed by the union of several earlier highly evangelistic bodies, was also deeply concerned from the beginning for the extension of its work through evangelistic and missionary effort. District evangelism and city mission work had been common among all the constituent groups before the formation of the united body. The first foreign missionary from the United Missionary Church was one Eusebius Eby, an ardent promoter of home missions for many years, who as early as 1883 expressed a desire to enter foreign work. But he did not realize his wish until 1890, when he sailed for Africa, without church support. However, because of advanced age he did not long survive the torrid Liberian heat, and was buried near the scene of his pioneer efforts. But his sacrifice was not without results. The Conference soon sent out other missionaries, and just before World War I this branch of the church had fifty active workers in the field in Africa, China, India, Armenia, Tibet, and South America, as well as in numerous North American cities.

Among the Old Mennonites and the former Amish-Mennonites as noted elsewhere, the missionary interests were closely allied with that of education and Sunday school conferences; and centered largely around the

progressive congregation and publishing house at Elkhart, Indiana. The present Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities, organized in 1906, and now in charge of most the benevolent and mission enterprises of the church, was the outgrowth of a number of earlier voluntary evangelistic and charitable organizations which grew up as the spirit of missions and benevolences developed, all organized by the Elkhart group—Evangelizing Committee in 1883; Mennonite Evangelizing and Benevolent Board, 1896; and the Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities in 1906, with M. S. Steiner, of Ohio, as the first president. The Lancaster county and Franconia Mennonites have their independent mission enterprise. It will be remembered the first mission station established by this branch of the church was in Chicago in 1893; and the first foreign station in India, in 1898, following the great famine there, with W. B. Page of Indiana, and J. A. Ressler of Pennsylvania, and their wives, as the first missionaries.

The small group of Krimmer Brethren, too, brought their missionary zeal with them from Russia. Too small, however, to establish stations of their own, they were liberal supporters of the work of other groups. Since 1899 they have a mission enterprise among the negroes of North Carolina. In 1896 they also founded an orphans home in Kansas, but having no orphans of their own, they opened the establishment to outside sources, especially to children from the large cities. The experiment was not entirely a successful one, and the home was turned into an old people's home, later destroyed by fire.

The Evangelical Mennonite Brethren is another small group that was not behind their Russian brethren in their benevolent interests.

Thus far there has not been much activity among the more conservative branches in any of these efforts—such



groups as the Old Colonists, Old Order Amish, Reformed Mennonites, and Wisler Mennonites.

Many of the larger branches of the denomination also support their own hospitals, old people's homes, tuberculosis sanitariums, besides mutual insurance companies and other fraternal organizations.

A good summary of the mission and charitable interests of the American Mennonites as a whole is found in Ed. G. Kaufman's book "*The Development of the Missionary and Philanthropic Interest among the Mennonites of North America.*" He says:

The development of the missionary interest among the Mennonites has been accompanied by the development of other activities, all of which have mutually influenced each other. There are in America today (1931) eight Mennonite publishing houses, eight Mennonite higher educational institutions, twenty-five Mennonite hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the aged, and over seventy-five Mennonite city and rural missions. The Mennonites of America support and control sixteen foreign mission stations in India, Africa, South America, and among the American Indians. Since 1880, when their first missionaries entered the work, they have sent more than four hundred workers into the foreign field, not counting many who labored in non-Mennonite fields and under non-Mennonite boards. In these Mennonite foreign fields there are at present in round numbers, about sixty organized congregations, twelve thousand, five hundred church members with an equal number of children in mission schools, and more than two hundred and twenty-five missionaries at work. In recent years Mennonites of America have contributed more than \$400,000 annually for foreign missions alone. All this in fifty years.

## Literature and Publications

The Mennonites likewise were not a literary folk. Being for the most part a rural people and of a religious turn of mind they had few ambitions beyond the desire

to make an honest living for themselves and their families, and a passion to serve their God according to their convictions. The firstcomers to America brought few books with them, perhaps a well-worn Bible, a copy of their confession of faith and a prayer book. Occasionally one might find a family owning an old Dutch copy of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, a family heirloom likely, and soon unreadable by the younger generation. An occasional copy of the works of Menno Simons, too, in the same language could be found. The first meager supply of necessary books evidently was soon exhausted, for in 1708 the Germantown church wrote to Germany for a supply of Bibles, prayer books and catechisms.

In the course of time, however, the Mennonites wrote and published a good deal of reading matter. H. S. Bender, in his *Two Centuries of American Mennonite Literature* lists over eleven hundred separate titles of books and pamphlets written for and by Mennonites between 1727 and 1928. Few of these would rank very high as pure literature. They consist largely of doctrinal and controversial dissertations, local histories, hymn books, catechisms, year books, church papers, and similar works of a practical nature.

The first book printed expressly for the American Mennonites, strange to say, was an English edition of their confession of faith, issued at Amsterdam in 1712, and reprinted in Philadelphia in 1727. With one or two exceptions this was the only English edition of a standard Mennonite book for over a century and a half. The demand among the Mennonites at this particular time, according to the preface of the first edition, was for the purpose of setting themselves right with their fellow English colonists, for "the greatest part of the people doth not know what they (Mennonites) confess of the Word of God and by reason of that ignorance can't speak and judge rightly

of their confession nor of the confessors themselves, nay through prejudice as a strange and unheard of thing do abhor them so as not to speak well but oftentimes ill of them."

The most highly prized book among the early Mennonites, next to the Bible, was the *Martyr's Mirror*. This book was highly regarded because it not only told of the trials and sufferings of those of their own and kindred faiths, but often of those of their own blood; for many of the martyrs bore names still familiar among the Pennsylvania Mennonites and their descendants. The book was a voluminous work, as large as the old family Bible, and was available only in the Dutch language. The first European German edition did not appear until 1790.

There seemed little demand among the first generation of pioneers for more than the occasional copies of the book which the first settlers brought with them. But by the middle of the century the dangers which threatened the doctrine of non-resistance among their young people because of the colonial wars created a demand for their book of martyrs, written in a language that could be read by all. After attempting in vain to have the work published in Germany, the Pennsylvania churches contracted with the brethren of the Ephrata cloister for an edition of thirteen hundred copies. The undertaking was an arduous one, and it took three years to finish it. The Ephrata Brethren were obliged to manufacture their own paper, make the translation from the Dutch into the German, and do all the printing and binding. The book was issued in 1748, a large volume of over fourteen hundred pages, the most ambitious publication undertaking in Pennsylvania up to that time. The *Martyrs' Mirror* has gone through a number of editions since then, the last English edition coming from the press at Elkhart, Indiana,

in 1887, and a German edition printed at Scottdale, Pennsylvania, as recently as 1916.

The various works of Menno Simons were also familiar, but these were printed only in fragments. Among Menno's treatises the most important is the *Foundation Book*, which contains the most complete statement of his views. This was printed as a pamphlet at Lancaster in 1794 and was the first of his works to appear in an American edition. Other treatises were published through the nineteenth century, but the first complete edition was issued in German at Elkhart in 1876 and in English on the same press in 1871.

Dirk Philips, a co-laborer of Menno's, also wrote several books, the best known of which was *Enchiridion* or Handbook, a treatise on the characteristic Anabaptist doctrines, first published at Haarlem in 1578. The first American edition was published at Lancaster in 1811. Two later German editions appeared, and in 1910 it was translated into English by A. B. Kolb and published at Elkhart. It is still occasionally read among the Old Order Amish because the author stresses the strict observance of the "avoidance" practise. Philips was also one of the few old authors to write at length on the ordinance of foot washing.

Among other books found occasionally on the bookshelves of the Mennonite pioneers were several books of sermons written for the most part by Dutch and north German ministers of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Among these compilations were those of Jacob Denner (1659-1746), for many years a minister at Altona; and those written by Johann Deknatel, originally printed in Dutch, but later in 1757, in German. The latter was never issued in America, but Denner's collection was printed in 1792 in Germany at the expense of two Pennsylvanians for the Pennsylvania Mennonites.

The book was a large volume of over 1,500 pages, and the edition consisted of five hundred copies. In 1830, a book of sermons by Wilhelm Wynantz, also a minister at Altona, was translated from the Dutch by David Zug, an Amishman, of Belleville, Pennsylvania, and published at Lancaster.

Among other old books popular in Mennonite homes for years, all in German, were *Güldene Äpfel in Silber Schalen* printed at Ephrata in 1745, at the request of the Mennonite church; *Geistliches Blumengärtlein*, published for the eighth time in America in 1800; and *Die Wandelnde Seele*, written by a Mennonite minister at Alkmaar, J. P. Schabalje, in the seventeenth century, printed many times in the Dutch, translated into the German and recently published for the fourteenth time in America at Scottdale, Pennsylvania. This is undoubtedly the most popular Mennonite book ever written, outside of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, of course, and the works of Menno Simons, though it does not deal with a distinctly Mennonite question.

The book was popular among Mennonites everywhere in Holland, Germany, Russia and America. It is perhaps the only Mennonite book that has had a wide reading public outside Mennonite circles. The first American edition was published in Germantown in 1763, and the last in Scottdale in 1919. It was also published several times in English.

The first book written by an American author was *Ein Spiegel der Taufe, mit Geist, mit Wasser, und mit Blut*, published in 1744 on the Christopher Saur press, which was reprinted many times. The author, Elder Heinrich Funck, migrated to America in 1717 and became the founder of a long line of Funks, many of them prominent publishers, including J. F. Funk, founder of the Mennonite Publishing Company of Elkhart; and Joseph Funk,



pioneer Virginia printer. Elder Funck also wrote a more extended work, *Restitution*, a treatise on a number of the principal points of the law, their fulfillment and significance. The book was published by his children after his death, was reprinted at Lancaster in 1862, and was put through an English edition at Elkhart as late as 1915. This book has the distinction of being the only American Mennonite work to be published abroad, being issued at Biel, Switzerland, in 1844.

Christian Funk, son of the above, and founder of the first division in the American church, published at Germantown in 1785 a justification of his activities, which in 1805 appeared in English as *A Mirror for all Mankind*.

Not to be forgotten among eighteenth century writings was Christopher Dock's *Schulordnung*, published after his death in 1770, by Christopher Saur, Jr.

During the early and middle nineteenth century the books of Mennonite authorship were for the most part controversial in character and were written by the founders of various church divisions in defence of their views and activities. Among these men were John Herr, Daniel Hoch, Daniel Musser, John H. Oberholtzer (1809-1895), John Holdeman (1832-1900) and Jacob Stauffer.

The most enduring literary work done in the last hundred years has been that in the realm of church history. The earliest work in this field was Benjamin Eby's *Short History of the Mennonites*, which appeared first in 1841 in Berlin, Canada, and whose chief merit is that it appeared first. Daniel Musser's *History of the Reformed Mennonite Church* was published at Lancaster in 1873. *Abriss der Geschichte der Mennoniten* by Professor C. H. Wedel of Bethel College, in four volumes (1901-1904), was the best and most readable work on the subject that had appeared. Wedel also wrote a number of other books on general church history, on the Mennonites, on the cate-

chism, etc. C. H. A. van der Smissen, pastor at Summerfield at the time, published in 1895 a short treatise on the history and the doctrines of the Mennonites, which also included his father's translation of the Cornelis Ris *Confession of Faith*. D. K. Cassel's *Geschichte der Mennoniten* published in German in 1890, and in English two years earlier, is largely a compilation of historical articles appearing in earlier publications, and written by other authors, many of them from the pen of Governor S. W. Pennypacker. Governor Pennypacker, himself of direct Mennonite descent, was greatly interested in Mennonite affairs and was one of the pioneer writers to arouse general attention to the importance of early American Mennonite history. H. P. Krehbiel's extensive *History of the General Conference*, in two volumes, was published in 1898 and in 1938. Hartzler and Kauffman's *Mennonite Church History* was printed at Scottdale in 1905. The same press published also in 1916 *Menno Simons, His Life, Labors and Teachings*, by John Horsch.

During the past twenty-five years an increasing number of scholarly works of an historical character have appeared, most of them university doctoral dissertations, on various regional and state histories, or treatises on missionary and educational developments among the Mennonites. Never before had Mennonites of America experienced such interest and activities in the field of Mennonite research as during and after the second World War.

It will be observed that all these treatises deal with practical subjects, and can hardly be classed as pure literature. There is very little poetry or fiction. Non-Mennonite novelists, however, have occasionally tried their hand at depicting Mennonite characteristics. The best known of recent novels in this field is still Helen R. Martin's *Tillie a Mennonite Maid* written in 1904, featuring the Mennonites of Lancaster county. Later novels by

Mrs. Martin in this same field have not reached the popularity of her first effort. In 1924, Miss B. Mabel Dunham of Kitchener, Ontario, wrote of the Ontario Mennonites in her *The Trail of the Conestoga*. In a later novel *Toward Sodom* Miss Dunham chose the immigration of the Russian Mennonites to Manitoba as a subject for her effort. *The Straw in the Wind*, written by an embryo young Indiana authoress recently, depicting in an unfavorable and false light the life among the Amish of northern Indiana, has not received much public notice. Among the numerous books of fiction on the Amish for adults and children, Joseph W. Yoder's books should be mentioned as sympathetic portrayals of the Amish.

A fictional treatment of Low German-speaking Mennonites of Kansas was attempted by Otto Schrag, in his novel, *The Locusts*, which appeared in the English and German languages. Gordon Friesen, of Mennonite background, presents in his novel, *Flamethrowers*, a perverted picture of family and social life, which he obviously places in a Mennonite community of Kansas. Theodor Fontane, a well-known German writer, wrote a novel entitled *Quitt.* in which he treats the Mennonites in connection with their Indian mission at Darlington, Oklahoma, in a sympathetic manner. More and more the Mennonites and their ideals are being used as subject matter for novels and short stories.

The American Mennonites themselves have thus far not produced any outstanding writers. The Canadian Mennonite writers who have produced noteworthy literary works are still of Russo-German background. Among them the best cultural portrayals of the Low German Mennonites have been given by Arnold Dyck in *Verloren in der Steppe*, Peter Epp in *Eine Mutter*, and Peter Klassen in *Grossmutter's Schatz*.

In any discussion of the reading matter to which our

Mennonite forefathers had access and which they perused for pleasure or profit we must by no means neglect to mention *Saur's Almanac* issued at Germantown during the eighteenth century; and *Baer's Almanac* from Lancaster, printed throughout the nineteenth century and still found for sale in the bookstores of every Pennsylvania German community. Important, too, as sources of valuable historical information are the various year books published by the presses of the Old Mennonites and the General Conference Mennonites, as well as several of the other groups.

### Hymnology

In the field of Mennonite hymnology the old *Ausbund* easily holds the center of interest. The *Ausbund*, which is undoubtedly the oldest hymnbook still in use anywhere in America, consists of a collection of one hundred and forty hymns from various sources, including a nucleus of fifty-one originally composed for the most part by a group of Swiss Mennonite captives driven out of Austria and imprisoned in the castle of Passau on the Bavarian frontier between 1535 and 1537. This collection was first printed during the middle of the sixteenth century, since which time twelve editions appeared in South Germany and Switzerland, the last issue being printed at Basel in 1838. This book became the adopted hymnal of the Swiss and South German Mennonites for several hundred years. When the first Palatines came to Pennsylvania they brought this book with them, as did also the Swiss Mennonites and the Alsatian Amish in Ohio and Illinois in the early nineteenth century. The first American edition was printed at Germantown in 1742. It has been frequently reprinted, and is still being used by the Amish of America.

This old book was never revised, merely reprinted,

thus perpetuating its original quaint colloquial Swiss-German. Many of the hymns are detailed narratives of the trials and the sufferings of the early martyrs; others consist of lengthy discourses upon some points of doctrine. Few of them possess anything of a lyrical quality. Most of them are long, several of them consisting of some scores of stanzas. They were printed without music. The melodies to which they were sung were transmitted orally from one generation to another and in this process the original melodies were often altered. To sing one song often required the better part of an hour. The opening verse of the Haslibacher hymn, still occasionally sung among the Old Order Amish, strangely enough on various festive occasions, is typical of the narrative character of many of the songs:

“Was wend wir aber heben an  
Zu singen von ein'm alten Mann  
Der war von Haslibach  
Haslibacher ward er genannt  
Aus der Kilchoeri Sumiswald.”

Another collection of hymns almost equally as venerable as those of the *Ausbund* is the collection used in worship by the Hutterites, many of which are also martyr stories first told in the sixteenth century. The collection was preserved in manuscripts in the archives of the various *Bruderhöfe* and were not put in print until 1916, when the Dakota Hutterites had them published at Scottsdale, Pennsylvania.

Although the *Ausbund* is still in use among the Old Order Amish, it was early discarded by the Pennsylvania Mennonites as well as by the Ohio Swiss, who also brought the old hymnal with them in the early part of the past century. Some of the successors of the venerable hymn book in Pennsylvania were the *Die kleine Geist-*



liche Harfe published in Franconia, in 1803; the *Unparteiisches Gesangbuch*, in Lancaster in 1804; the *Unparteiische Liedersammlung* in 1870. Among the Old Mennonites the first English hymnal was printed on the press of Joseph Funk, at Singers Glen, in Virginia, in 1847. The General Conference published, in 1873, the *Gesangbuch zum gottesdienstlichen und häuslichen Gebrauch*. In recent years numerous revised hymnals have appeared among the various groups. Some of the smaller conferences have adopted song books either from other branches of the church or altogether from other denominations or publishing houses. The Mennonites from Russia and Bavaria brought with them such hymn books as were in use in their home churches, but later adopted those of the conferences they affiliated with, mostly the General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren. The General Conference *Mennonite Hymnary*, first published in 1940, has found general acceptance even beyond the Conference. In 1949 this Hymnary was followed by a *Handbook* by Lester Hostetler. In 1942 the *Gesangbuch der Mennoniten* was published by the General Conference, primarily for the use of the Canadian churches.

### **Publishing Houses and Periodicals**

Each branch of the church today has its own church paper. Most of these were at first started as a private enterprise by some aggressive member more concerned for the welfare of his church than the common-run, but later taken over officially by the various conferences. Among the early Mennonite literary centers were Singers Glen in Virginia, where in 1847 Joseph Funk established a small printing press on which he published the well-known song book the *Harmonia Sacra*, and various other early books on song and religion; Milford Square, in Bucks county, Pennsylvania, was the home for a time

of the literary productions of John H. Oberholtzer, and later of the Eastern Mennonite Conference, including, in 1852, the *Religiöser Botschafter*, and in 1881, the *Mennonite*, as well as numerous pamphlets and books by Mennonite writers mostly of the General Conference wing; Berlin, Ontario, was the home of Benjamin Eby whose son Heinrich operated a printing establishment in which were printed a number of pamphlets and books of Mennonite interest, including Benjamin's brief history of the Mennonites, in 1841. The largest and by far the most influential early private Mennonite publishing house was the Mennonite Publishing Company established by John F. Funk, in 1864, first in Chicago but soon removed to Elkhart, Indiana, where he published for many years the *Herald of Truth* and its German companion, *Herold der Wahrheit*, the complete works of Menno Simons, the *Martyrs' Mirror*, and numerous other Mennonite periodicals and books.

The Mennonite Publishing House located at Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, now owned by the Old Mennonite church conference is the successor to the Elkhart house; and publishes all their periodicals and other books and supplies. The General Conference of the Mennonite Church of North America, in cooperation with Bethel College, established in 1949 The Mennonite Press at North Newton, Kansas. Its publication interests are looked after by a publication board, which for some time had most of its printing needs provided for by the Berne Witness Company of Berne, Indiana, and more recently by the Herald Book and Printing Company of Newton, Kansas, both largely privately Mennonite owned. The Mennonite Brethren Publishing House is located in Hillsboro, Kansas.

The following are the various church organs at present—General Conference, the *Mennonite*, and *Der Bote*;

Old Mennonites, the *Gospel Herald*, and the *Christian Monitor*; Mennonite Brethren, the *Zionsbote* and the *Christian Leader*; Central Conference, the *Christian Evangel*; United Missionary Church, the *Gospel Banner*; Evangelical Mennonite Church, *Zion's Tidings*; Krimmer Brethren, the *Christian Witness*; Reformed Mennonites, *Good Tidings*; Old Order Amish, *Herold der Wahrheit*. The *Mitarbeiter*, for some years the official organ of the progressive Mennonite group in Manitoba and published at Gretna has since suspended. The *Brücke* represented the Mennonites of Brazil; and the *Menno Blatt*, those of Paraguay, both privately owned. Among the other private papers with a large Mennonite circulation, mostly among the Russian Mennonites, and of both religious and secular interest are the *Mennonite Weekly Review*, of Newton, Kansas; the *Hillsboro Journal*, of Hillsboro, Kansas; *Die Steinbach Post*, Steinbach, Manitoba; *The Altona Echo*, Altona, Manitoba. *Der Bote*, Rosthern, Saskatchewan, and *Die Mennonitische Rundschau*, formerly Elkhart, Indiana, now Winnipeg, Manitoba, have become conference publications, the former of the General Conference and the latter of the Mennonite Brethren.

The *Mennonite Quarterly Review* is a strictly scholarly and historical journal for research purposes published in connection with Goshen College. *Mennonite Life* published by Bethel College is an illustrated quarterly magazine featuring the total religious, economic, and social phases of Mennonite culture the world over, while the *Mennonite Community* (Scottdale, Pennsylvania), is a monthly illustrated magazine devoted to community life among the Old Mennonites. The Mennonite Central Committee publishes numerous bulletins of information concerning its field of labor.

## Farming and Other Vocations

With the exception of the first colonists in Germantown, the American Mennonites have been almost exclusively a farmer folk. They were farmers in Europe; and they became farmers in America, as did their children and children's children for generations after them. The city always seemed to these country-bred people more or less a center of worldly influence. Gradually a great change has come about. In cities like Los Angeles, Wichita, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Portland, and others we find that active and large congregations have emerged. City missions are developing into self-supporting congregations.

Increasingly, Mennonites are moving from nearby large compact farm communities into small villages. In some of these small villages the Mennonite population forms a dominant influence, especially near the large settlements in Mountain Lake, Minnesota; Halstead, Hillsboro, and Buhler, Kansas; Henderson, Nebraska; Reedley, California; Freeman, South Dakota; Rosthern, Saskatchewan; and numerous small villages on the fringe of the Mennonite Reserve in Manitoba; the Swiss settlements in Pandora and Bluffton, Ohio, and Berne, Indiana; the Old Mennonite settlements in Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, and others.

Mennonites have always been good farmers, among the best in the land. They are seldom found on poor soil, having somehow developed a keen sense of discrimination for good land in all pioneer settlements. If perchance they made a poor choice they moved out as soon as an occasion was presented. In Woodford county, Illinois, the Amish first settled in the early part of the century, before the prairies were opened up, on the washed out clay timberlands in the western end of the county. With

the opening up of the rich prairie lands in the eastern end of the county after the Civil War, the Amish Mennonites were the first to leave their clay knobs; and today there is hardly a single Mennonite left on the original farms. The poorest section of Lancaster county is the southern tip, but not a single Mennonite farmer among the twenty-five thousand Mennonites is found in this area.

Several years ago the United States Department of Agriculture designated Lancaster county, Pennsylvania, and McLean county, Illinois, as the two wealthiest farming counties in the nation. Both of these counties have a large Mennonite population.

Any one acquainted with the favorite farming sections of the country will easily recognize the truth of the above claims that Mennonites are good farmers—Wayne county, Ohio; Lancaster county, Pennsylvania; McLean and Livingston counties, Illinois; Johnson and Washington counties, Iowa; Harvey county, Kansas; the Mennonite Reserve, Manitoba. Land prices are highest in Mennonite communities. Perhaps the highest price ever paid for ordinary corn land in the United States was paid for a Livingston county farm of one hundred and sixty acres, during the land boom directly after World War I—\$700 per acre.

Of course while Mennonites in the main remained on the farm, yet there were always young men here and there a bit more ambitious than their fellows, who found their way into the cities, and entering business or professional life, made good. Such prominent American names as *Rittenhouse*, *Pennypacker*, *Landes*, *Frick*, *Cunard*, *Herr*, *Hershey* and many others are plain evidence of the fact that not all the Mennonite boys stayed down on the farm. But they were not followed up by their home congregations to organize them in the city. They seldom came back to either the farm or the church. To their credit be it



said, however, they usually retained their religion, and gave valuable service to other denominations.

Among the other lines of occupation and professions that were open to Mennonites of conservative leaning, the least objectionable was that of the teacher. An unusual number of Mennonites are found in this profession, both in the public schools and in colleges and universities. There is hardly a large college or university in the land today that does not have on its faculty one or more professors of immediate or indirect Mennonite origin.

Medicine, too, as well as nursing among the young women, has a strong appeal for such as see in it a fruitful field for serving their fellow men. Law has never been popular among the American Mennonites, and there are not many lawyers among them, except one here and there among the General Conference Mennonites and several of the other more liberal wings. From this group, too, have come in recent years several congressmen and members of state legislatures, a United States senator, an attorney general in a middle west state, numerous mayors of small towns and cities and a few also in larger cities, several judges and other public officials. It is perhaps even questionable whether a successful member of the legal profession can remain a bona fide, non-resistant, war opposing, lawsuit opposing Mennonite of the traditional type.

In late years also Mennonites have entered the business world, and have contributed their share to the captains of industry and successful business men.

### **Adventures in Fellowship**

In World War I the youth of the congregations of all groups confronted the same problems. Never before had they learned to know each other as intimately as at this time. At the draft board, in camps, and in prisons they experienced a new fellowship. The needs of a war-

torn world challenged many to work together in foreign countries. This was the bright side of a dark chapter described in *Feeding the Hungry*.

Another avenue of cooperation and exchange of thought, although on a smaller scale, was the All-Mennonite Convention meeting triennially from 1913 to 1936. The sessions, held in various parts of the country, were attended by leading representatives of various conferences.

More recently the Mennonite colleges have organized into a Council of Mennonite and Affiliated Colleges. At the annual meetings the educators discuss their common problems, arrange foreign student exchanges, sponsor the Conference on Mennonite Cultural Problems, etc. The latter meets annually to discuss social, educational, and religious problems in connection with Mennonite culture.

The Mennonite Research Fellowship, begun during World War II, presents possibilities of exchange of thought in fields of Mennonite research. It was this fellowship that conceived and promoted the plan to publish an American *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.

Research pertaining to Mennonite history, theology, and other phases, has been conducted during the last decades on a larger scale than ever before in America. Goshen, Bethel, and Bluffton colleges have been the center of these activities. However, many non-Mennonite graduate schools have also given opportunity for students to do special research in these fields. Numerous books published recently and magazines such as *Mennonite Quarterly Review* and *Mennonite Life* give evidence of an unprecedented activity and interest in this field. The larger colleges have established Mennonite historical libraries and some of the conferences have active historical committees charged with the responsibility of pre-

serving material pertaining to our Mennonite heritage and making it available for public use. A large collection of items in this area of interest can also be found in the Kauffman Museum on the campus of Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.

In World War II and its aftermath, young Mennonite men and women from all the various groups were brought together in a manner that had never been true before. They lived and worked together for the same reasons in various units of Civilian Public Service and went out to distant places to help suffering humanity in the name of Christ. Through these activities a much better understanding of the European Mennonites has also resulted from close contact with them through relief activities, conferences, and the student exchange program.

Unprecedented was the occasion of the fourth Mennonite World Conference, held for the first time in America. It was unique in a number of ways. First, it offered an occasion for American Mennonites to meet—for many, no doubt, the first time—to fellowship together and to discuss common problems. Secondly, it proved an occasion for the American Mennonite "home front," which had not the opportunity of going abroad, to meet fellow-believers from other lands who had suffered so much and had received help from their American brethren. Finally, it made possible through the meeting of the largest number of Mennonites coming from all over the world, a common experience of their faith and hope and their desire to discharge their Christian responsibility in a world torn by conflict and fear.

The Mennonite world conferences held in Basel, 1952, and in Karlsruhe, 1957, were also of great significance as meeting places for Mennonites the world over who want to learn from each other and face unitedly the problems of the world on a common Christian basis.



## XVI

# WITNESSING IN WAR AND PEACE

## CHURCH AND STATE IN EARLY AMERICA

### The Oath

On no other points of their faith have the American Mennonites been so often misunderstood as on their attitude toward the oath and warfare. Their objection to the oath and their refusal to bear arms have been repeatedly misconstrued, both in Europe and America, as indicating a spirit of disloyalty to their adopted country. In Pennsylvania the Mennonites were welcomed by the Quakers, who held similar views on these questions, but the law passed by the English Parliament permitting the affirmation instead of the oath applied to the Quakers only. Mennonites and others who had similar scruples against the taking of the oath on becoming naturalized were compelled to petition for the privilege. The Mennonites, in 1717, and the Amish, in 1742, were granted the rights of affirmation.

In Maryland the constitution of 1776 specifically mentions "Quakers, Tunkers, and Menonists," to whom the right of affirmation is guaranteed wherever an oath would otherwise be required. Today this right is guaranteed both by the Federal Constitution and in practically every state, and frequently even those not belonging to a non-resistant faith avail themselves of the privilege.

The refusal to take the oath did not seem to involve



the Pennsylvania Mennonites in any serious consequences before the Revolutionary War; but the Declaration of Independence, which severed the political ties between Pennsylvania and the British Empire, introduced a new problem. The Pennsylvania Assembly passed an act on June 13, 1777, demanding that all inhabitants of the former province now take an oath of allegiance to the new sovereign state. According to this act all male inhabitants above the age of eighteen were to take the oath before the following July, renouncing their allegiance to the king of Great Britain, and promising loyalty to Pennsylvania as an independent state. Later amendments to the act provided that all those refusing to take the oath were to be sent to jail for thirty days or pay a heavy fine. The third refusal was to be followed by an order of exile from the state within thirty days and the confiscation of all the personal property of the one expelled.

The act was aimed at the Tories, of course, but also involved some Mennonites who had a tender conscience on the matter of oaths in general. In the large compact areas like Lancaster county, where the principles of the Mennonites were well known, and where their numbers served as a restraining influence against hasty action, there was probably little difficulty in convincing the authorities that the hesitancy of the Mennonites to take the prescribed oath was not due to their political principles, but rather to their religious convictions. In the smaller isolated communities, however, the Mennonites occasionally encountered serious difficulty. We have on record the experiences of at least one community at Saucon in Lehigh County, where they paid the extreme penalty for their convictions. The whole adult male population seemingly of the congregation was sent to jail, all their personal belongings, including bedding, stoves, furniture, dishes, food supplies, and even their

Bibles were confiscated; and their wives and children deprived of all the necessities of life, ordered to leave the state within thirty days. A petition to the general assembly on September 10, 1778 by the wives of several of the prisoners, accompanied by a similar petition from some of the non-Mennonite neighbors, attesting to the good reputation of the Mennonites, and ascribing their reluctance to take the oath and their "present blindness to their own essential interests" to an "unhappy bias in their education and not from any disaffection to the present government," may have brought some relief. We have no further record of what disposition was made of these victims of the war spirit. It is likely, however, that the men were released and the order for exile repealed, though it may be entirely likely that their property, classed with that of the Tories, may have remained in the possession of the state.

### **Military Service**

Exemption from military service was also generally recognized, and conscientious scruples were always given careful consideration by those in authority. The only colonies in which Mennonites were located at the time of the Revolutionary War were Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia. In each of these Mennonites were exempted from military musters, which seemed to be generally provided for by the local county authorities, upon the payment of a sum of money usually called a fine. In Virginia, however, in 1777, where provisions were made for conscription, it was possible for Mennonites who were drafted for service to be discharged upon furnishing a substitute, who was to be paid by a levy upon the membership of the entire church.

After the war, in 1790, the constitution of Pennsylvania declared that "those who conscientiously scruple

to bear arms shall not be compelled to bear arms, but shall pay an equivalent." A law of Maryland, in 1793, provided that "Quakers, Mennonites, and Tunkers and all others who are conscientiously scrupulous of bearing arms, and who refuse to do military duty shall pay a sum of three dollars annually." The Virginia code of laws in force, in 1860, provided that all citizens refusing to attend military musters must pay a fine of seventy-five cents, which of course the Mennonites freely paid. The wars of 1812 and of 1848, as well as the war of 1898, were all fought by volunteers, and consequently there was no occasion to test the faith of the non-resistant churches.

In the Civil War, both the North and the South were finally forced to resort to conscription. The federal act of February 24, 1864, exempted those having conscientious scruples, permitting them to accept hospital service when drafted, or to pay \$300 exemption money. No person, however, was to be entitled to the benefit of this clause unless his declaration of conscientious scruples "shall be supported by satisfactory evidence that his deportment had been uniformly consistent with such declaration." This exemption clause, it will be observed, differed from the provision permitting substitutes, by which one could secure exemption by furnishing a substitute at such price, of course, as the substitute demanded. Under this law Mennonites were able with but few exceptions to live their life of non-resistance undisturbed in their various communities.

In the South, Virginia resorted to universal service almost from the beginning, and no exceptions were made in behalf of religious scruples. A number of Mennonites from Rockingham county were called into the army in 1861. These refused to fight. Others were captured attempting to escape through the lines into the North. These were imprisoned in *Libby Prison* for a time and

tried, but because of their religious convictions were permitted to go home. Early in 1862 Virginia passed a law exempting members of a church forbidding the bearing of arms upon the payment of \$500, and the further sum of two per cent of the assessed valuation of all taxable property. In case of the refusal of such members to comply with this law or the inability to do so, they were to be taken into some form of non-combatant service.

This law, however, was soon superseded in the same year by the general conscription act of the Confederate Government, which also provided for the exemption of members of the "Society of Friends, Association of Dunkards, Nazarenes and Menonists" upon the payment of \$500. All these religious denominations, being opposed to both slavery and war, were bitterly denounced in their communities by those not of their faith, but they were not compelled to take up arms by the government until the summer of 1864, when, because of the great need of men, the Confederate Congress repealed all exemptions. A number of the young men escaped through the lines into western Virginia and into the North. The Mennonite communities, being located in the heart of the Shenandoah Valley, also suffered heavily from the numerous raids made through the valley.

### Canadian Laws

The Canadian Government has been more considerate of conscientious scruples even than the United States. As early as 1808, Ontario passed a law exempting "Quakers, Menonists and Tunkers" from militia service, upon an annual payment of twenty shillings in time of peace, and five pounds when the militia should be called out for defense. Refusal to comply with this law was to be punished by a jail sentence of not more than a month. In 1839 the fine was raised to ten pounds instead of

five, and later several minor changes were made in the law, but its general purport remained the same. In 1868, after the formation of the present Dominion of Canada, an act was passed exempting Quakers, Mennonites, Dunkards and all members of other religious denominations opposed to war from militia service under such conditions as the Governor-in-Council might prescribe. This law was still in force at the time World War I broke out, although perhaps not generally known. The conscription act of 1917 exempted from combatant service all religious bodies opposed to war in principle.

The clause in this act which exempts only from combatant service, it will be observed, differs from the act of 1868, which exempts from all service. The act of 1868 was the basis on which the Canadian Government promised the Russian Mennonites who settled in Manitoba in 1873 complete military exemption as a condition of their migration to that province. The state of Kansas also guaranteed exemption from military musters to all those conscientiously opposed to bearing arms, in behalf of the Russian Mennonites in 1874. This guarantee was confirmed as late as 1915, but it is of no value, since it is subservient to the federal law on the subject. Nebraska followed a few years later with a similar law.

## WORLD WAR I

### In Canada

When the Canadian conscription act of 1917 was passed, the government, upon being reminded of this early regulation and promise by a committee of Mennonites from the western provinces, graciously agreed to abide by the promises made to the early Mennonite settlers in 1873, and granted entire exemption to all the descendants, both baptised and unbaptised, of these



settlers. Whether this liberal provision would apply also to the Mennonites of Ontario, who were not a party to the agreement of 1873, but were included under the act of 1868, at first seemed doubtful. A number of Ontario young Mennonites were taken into the army at first, and upon refusing to serve were court-martialed and given a two-year prison sentence, but which was later changed to farm furloughs. As just indicated, the laws of 1868 and 1917 were not quite similar, but the Canadian Government finally decided to abide by the more liberal provisions of 1868 and the promises of 1873, and thus granted the Ontario Mennonites the same generous consideration as that given to members of the church in Manitoba and the western provinces.

The Canadian churches also took a stand in the beginning of World War I against contributing to war loans. But upon the promise of the Government at the time of the last loan that Mennonite money was to be used only for relief purposes and not for direct war purposes, the Russian churches all endorsed the loans, and it is estimated that they raised about a half million dollars in the western provinces. Red Cross and Y. M. C. A. campaigns they supported heartily. In the last drive each farmer was expected to contribute fifty dollars, for each quarter section of land, and business and professional men accordingly. It is estimated that some \$200,000 was raised for this work, an average of over six dollars for every man, woman and child among them.

Few of the young men enlisted in the service and such as did were usually considered as being under church censure. The price paid by the Mennonites, however, for their exemptions was disfranchisement for the period of the war. The Dominion Government was considerate of Mennonite scruples throughout the war, but in some localities, especially in the extreme west,

considerable bitterness began to develop near the close over a new problem. The question as to whether the exemption applied to Mennonites who should enter Canada after the passing of the conscription act was precipitated by the migration of a number of Mennonites from the States, especially the Hutterites from South Dakota, who bought large tracts of land in Saskatchewan and Alberta for the purpose of escaping service and intimidation in the United States. Appeals were made to the government by numerous local organizations not only to prevent the settlement, but even to repeal the original exemption clause. The government took no formal action on the matter, but it seemed the opinion of many of those in authority that such immigrants were not entitled to the exemption; and had the war continued much longer, measures would perhaps have been taken to restrict the privileges of the new arrivals. As it was, much bitter feeling was developing throughout the north-west, especially against the Hutterites.

### **In the United States**

Within the United States World War I tried the faith of the Mennonites as no other American war had. The struggle was on such an enormous scale, and demanded such a complete mobilization of the nation's resources that every single individual was called upon to bear his share of the burden. The universal service law, the popular liberty bond campaigns; and Red Cross and Y. M. C. A. fund drives immediately singled out and marked as "slackers" those who would not participate, no matter what their motives may have been.

The National Congress, however, influenced by numerous petitions from the non-resistant churches, by influential Quakers, the example of the English conscription act, and our own former precedents, included a

exemption clause in the conscription law passed May 18, 1917. This clause was found in the bill as it came from the hands of the Committee on Military Affairs. It was debated, several attempts were made to amend it; and one vote was taken in the Senate to repeal it, but it remained practically as it came from the hands of the committee. The clause exempted on religious grounds:

Members of any well organized religious sect or organization at present organized and existing whose creed or principles forbid its members to participate in war in any form and whose religious convictions are against war or participation therein in accordance with the creed or principles of the said organization. But no person shall be exempted from service in any capacity that the President shall declare non-combatant.

Under this law a number of young Mennonites were drafted and taken to various camps during the summer and fall of 1917. In the meantime the church leaders were formulating the policy for the church at large toward the war problem. The view became quite general during the summer that in order to maintain their non-resistant principles they could not even accept non-combatant service if it was to be conducted under the military department of the government. The *Gospel Herald* opposed the acceptance of non-combatant service, and declared it inconsistent to participate in Red Cross, YMCA and liberty loan campaigns, and all other campaigns for direct war purposes. Several of the other papers reflected the same opinion, but none of them were so outspoken. The *Mennonite*, organ of the General Conference, while thoroughly in sympathy with the non-resistant attitude, advocated participation in auxiliary war-fund drives. A meeting held at Goshen, Indiana, July 9-10, 1918, of representatives from nearly all of the branches of the denomination, declared against entering non-combatant

service under the military arm of the government, and sent a petition to the president stating this decision. During all this time, too, a number of special committees from the various branches of the church were in communication with the War Department working in behalf of some sort of service not under the military organization.

### **The Conscientious Objector**

The War Department in the meantime found the problem of the conscientious objector a difficult one. Many of the young men from all branches of the church refused to put on the uniform and to perform work of any sort. These were frequently roughly handled by petty officers who had little sympathy for their scruples nor the law under which they were permitted to enter non-combatant service. In all the camps they were subjected to ridicule and were considered fair game for any army officer or Y. M. C. A. secretary who cared to take a hand in converting them. Even some of the higher officers in some of the camps, being entirely out of sympathy with the liberal policy of the War Department, permitted unnecessary abuse of the conscientious objectors, as those were called who refused to work in the camps even at non-combatant work, and usually refused to don the uniform. In Camp Funston the worst abuses prevailed, and two officers, a major and a captain, were removed for negligence in permitting rough treatment of the conscientious objectors. Some of these latter were brutally handled in the guard house; they were bayoneted, beaten and tortured by various forms of the water cure; eighteen men one night were aroused from their sleep and held under cold showers until one became hysterical. Another objector had the hose played upon his head until he became unconscious. The War Depart-

ment finally was forced to interfere a short time before the armistice was signed with the result noted above.

In other camps similar abuse prevailed, carried on usually by under officers for the purpose of breaking down the morale of the conscientious objector, or perhaps to retaliate for his refusal to obey peremptory military orders. Men were forced to stand at attention, sometimes with outstretched arms for hours and days at a time on the sunny or cold side of their barracks, exposed to the inclemencies of the weather as well as to the jeers and taunts of their fellows until they could stand no longer; chased across the fields at top speed until they fell down exhausted, followed by their guards on motor cycles; occasionally tortured by mock trials, in which the victim was left under the impression to the very last that unless he submitted to the regulations the penalty would be death. Every conceivable device—ridicule, torture, offer of promotion and other tempting inducements were resorted to in order to get them to give up their convictions; but with only few exceptions the religious objectors refused to compromise with their consciences.

Fortunately for the Mennonites, both President Wilson and Secretary Baker displayed the greatest consideration for the scruples of the sincere objectors. These abuses were not perpetrated with the consent of the War Department; and those guilty of them were usually punished as soon as discovered. Secretary Baker stretched the conscription act to the limit to meet the situation. The government was rather slow in working out a satisfactory policy, but by the spring of 1918 a fairly satisfactory system of taking care of the conscientious objector was evolved. The abuses above described continued in some of the camps, however, throughout the period of the war, due to the inability of the War Department to keep in close touch with all the details of the



work of the vast military machine in charge of organizing the army.

On March 16, 1918, upon the suggestion of the Secretary of War, Congress passed a law permitting the department to furlough out certain men in camp for agricultural purposes whenever it was deemed advisable. On March 20, the president for the first time defined non-combatant service. On April 22, the War Department completed its program for the conscientious objector who refused all work. First of all a special Board of Inquiry, consisting of Julian W. Mack, of the Supreme Court, Dean H. F. Stone of the Columbia Law School, and Major Richard C. Stoddard of the United States Army, was appointed to visit the various camps in which conscientious objectors had been segregated and weed out those who were sincere from the spurious ones. Those who were found to be sincere were to be sent to a detention camp at Fort Leavenworth, from whence they were to be furloughed out for farm work. Court-martial was provided for three classes, the insincere, those who were defiant, and such as were engaged in active propaganda among others. The first class was to be sent into the ranks, while the other two were to be given prison sentence. This program was carried out only in part. Those classed as sincere were not sent to the Fort Leavenworth detention camp, but were furloughed out for farm work directly from the camps to which they had been sent originally. Such as went to Fort Leavenworth did so under prison sentence.

The young men in the meantime in whose behalf the church was formulating its advice and the government its war policy were compelled to work out their own line of action. Not all followed the recommendations of the Goshen meeting already referred to. As to the exact number who accepted some form of non-combatant service it is not quite certain. Neither has anyone ascertained

as yet how many Mennonites were in all the camps. But since many had deferred classification both because of occupational and dependency reasons, the number was less than the general average of other classes. Perhaps between fifteen hundred and two thousand, all told, were in camp and overseas during the war.

Of these it would seem that a majority, taking the denomination as a whole, refused service of any sort; a strong minority accepted non-combatant service with the uniform; while a very few entered the regular service. The church as a whole, and especially the leadership, stood quite unitedly in favor of maintaining the non-resistant doctrine. Among the young men, however, in different sections and in isolated congregations there was some difference of practise. The following random observations have come to the casual notice of the writer. The Hutterites were the only group whose young men stood as a unit against service of any sort. The Krimmer Brethren had fifty young men in camp. Twenty-eight of these were conscientious objectors; twenty took non-combatant service; and two entered the regular service, one of whom was killed on the battlefield. The Central Illinois Conference with a membership of twenty-six hundred reported in August in 1918, seventy-two men in the service. Of these twenty-six had enlisted; thirty-eight were in the regular service; twenty-seven were non-combatants, and only five were classed as conscientious objectors, who refused all work. Of the Old Mennonites and Amish a large majority were conscientious objectors, though some of these accepted camp work. Among the Mennonites of the General Conference and *Mennonite Brethren*, perhaps three-fourths of those in Kansas and Oklahoma were of the conscientious objector class, while the remainder took non-combatant service. Barely a dozen among them throughout the west took

regular service. On the Pacific coast and in Minnesota there were a larger number of non-combatants and fewer conscientious objectors. The Eastern District Conference Mennonites generally accepted non-combatant service. The Mennonite Brethren in Christ were largely of the conscientious objector class. The large Swiss community of Bluffton, Ohio, had a few men in the regular service, but all the rest were non-combatants. None were conscientious objectors. The Swiss congregation at Berne, on the other hand, had a number of conscientious objectors, several of whom were sent to Fort Leavenworth. One congregation in Iowa, perhaps, was outstanding in having practically all of its young men in the regular service.

Mennonites were by no means the only people who refused to enter the army. Quakers, Dunkards and other peace denominations, totalling perhaps an entire population of one million, all came under the exemption clause of the conscription act. Both the Quakers and the Dunkards, however, accepted the non-combatant service prescribed by the law far more generally than did the Mennonites. This circumstance, together with the fact that many of the latter were of more recent German origin, explains why the Mennonites were given more unfavorable publicity during the war than the other non-resistant denominations.

Major Kellogg, a later member of the Board of Inquiry, in his book entitled, *The Conscientious Objector*, states that twenty-one hundred objectors were examined by the Board, half of whom he estimates were Mennonites. Of these, fifteen hundred were recommended for farm or industrial furloughs; eighty for work in the Friends' Reconstruction Unit; three hundred and ninety for non-combatant service; and one hundred and twenty were sent back into the regular service as in-

sincere. The above number does not include thirteen hundred who took non-combatant service, nor four hundred who were sent to Fort Leavenworth.

Of the four hundred conscientious objectors confined in the disciplinary barracks at Fort Leavenworth at the close of the war, only about one-third were Mennonites. So far as the Mennonites and other religious objectors were concerned these were practically all here because of the wilful misrepresentation of local courts-martial. The law provided that only the insincere and defiant be given prison sentence. The "wilful disobedience of orders of officers" which constituted the charge against practically all of these, of course, in reality meant the refusal of sincere objectors to obey orders which ran counter to their religious convictions.

### **Treatment of Some CO's**

Some of these prisoners at Fort Leavenworth, including a few Mennonites, suffered tortures which would have done credit to the medieval Inquisition at the hands of prison guards and officials for refusing to perform certain service which they regarded as inconsistent with their religious convictions. They were regarded by the prison authorities as ordinary criminals, and not as political prisoners. Some refused to work on the ground that the prison was a part of the military system; others, for various reasons, refused to put on the uniform; still others refused to work because of sympathy for those who were unjustly disciplined. Some of these men may have carried their logic to unnecessary lengths, but no matter what the provocation, there was no justification for the harsh measures adopted in breaking the spirit of these men whose only crime was a tender conscience. Among the methods resorted to were "continuous solitary confinement in cells in a hole under the basement of

the prison, sleeping on a cement floor between foul blankets full of vermin, fed every alternate two weeks on bread and water, forbidden to read and write or talk, manacled in a standing posture for nine hours a day to the bars of the cell. In addition they were frequently beaten and tortured by the guards."

Among those given this treatment were several Mennonites. Two Hutterite young men, who had been removed to Fort Leavenworth from Alcatraz where they had been submitted to the most brutal treatment for refusing to put on the uniform and perform the work assigned them, died as a result of exposure and torture received at the hands of prison guards. Two young Amishmen sent here from Camp Sherman refused to don the prison uniform because their creed forbade them to wear clothes with buttons. Both were forcibly disrobed by guards and held under cold showers until they were thoroughly chilled. One of them was dragged across the cell room by the hair, knocked down upon the cement floor and then pulled up by the ears and otherwise roughly handled. As a result of this treatment both of them submitted to prison labor contrary to their religious convictions.

The National Civil Liberties Bureau, together with such journals as the *Survey*, *Nation* and the *New Republic*, gave these abuses of the conscientious objectors in the Leavenworth prison wide publicity with the result that a short time afterwards the War Department ordered the abolition of manacling and other severe methods of punishment. Still later, January 25, 1919, one hundred and thirteen of the conscientious objectors, mostly Mennonites, were honorably discharged from the army and released from prison. The Mennonites here were principally from the western states.



It is only fair to add, perhaps, that the large majority of the Mennonites at Fort Leavenworth had little cause to complain of their treatment as prisoners. It was only those who because of their tender consciences refused to perform the prison work assigned them and to put on the prison garb who were given the drastic treatment described above.

These hundred, of course, constituted only a small portion of the Mennonite conscientious objectors. Many of these were furloughed out for farm work directly from their local camps. A number were permitted to enter the reconstruction work carried on by the Friends' Reconstruction Unit. The furlough system worked fairly well, but in some localities the non-Mennonite population objected to the presence of farm hands from the camps and they had to be sent back.

### A Word for the Conscientious Objector

It is perhaps not out of place here to say a few words further in behalf of the conscientious objectors regarding their attitude toward war service. Not only were they subjected to these gross abuses in camp; they were also most bitterly reviled and denounced by almost the entire press of the country, the *Kansas City Star*, and the *Chicago Tribune* being especially severe in their criticism. There were few voices raised in their behalf either from pulpit or platform. Everywhere they were denounced as slackers, cowards, parasites, draft-dodgers; the most charitable epithet applied to them was that of religious fanatics. Theodore Roosevelt, always intolerant of any views contrary to his own, was most vindictive in his utterance against them. He suggested that all men who had conscientious scruples against war service should be sent to the most dangerous points of the front line with

shovels to dig trenches; or be placed on mine sweepers; they were not fit to live in America, he said, and ought to be denied all political rights. It was only such liberal journals as the *Nation* and others as already noted, that dared raise a voice in behalf of freedom of speech and liberty of conscience.

While much of this bitterness must be ascribed to war madness, yet some of it was due, no doubt, to the failure of the people in general to understand the character, and appreciate the point of view of the men who refused war service on the ground of conscientious convictions. The average citizen is so thoroughly indoctrinated all through his life in the school room, from the pulpit and the platform, and by the press with the idea that it is his most sacred duty to come to the defense of his country with gun and sword whenever called upon, that, unless he has been brought up in one of the non-resistant denominations, which make opposition to war as well as the taking of human life for any purpose whatever a fundamental religious doctrine, he utterly fails to appreciate how anyone can have a conscience against the practise of warfare. Many regarded the conscientious objector as an ordinary draft-dodger, trying to shirk his honest duty; or endowed with a yellow streak that made him cringe from danger. Undoubtedly even under the most favorable circumstances there would have been considerable opposition to the granting of special privileges and exemptions even on grounds of religious scruples; yet a better understanding of the real spirit of the conscientious objector might have disarmed his more intelligent critics at least of some of their bitter antagonism.

A coward he certainly was not. The conscription act offered an easy way out for those who had scruples

against war. A strong minority of the Mennonites, and most of the Dunkards and the Quakers accepted this easy escape. But the other half of the Mennonite contingent in the camps, refusing to compromise with their consciences took the hard way. Neither was the conscientious objector a slacker; he was willing to do any kind of work, in the danger zone or out, if its purpose was to save life rather than to destroy it, and if it was not connected with the military establishment. He was neither a coward nor a slacker; he chose the hard road of loyalty to his convictions rather than the easy one of compromise. He was made of the same stuff as that of his forefathers who some hundreds of years earlier went to the martyr's stake by the thousands rather than to surrender religious beliefs which they thought to be right.

But even the warmest friends of the conscientious objector sometimes wondered whether he did not carry his logic to unnecessary lengths, and whether he at times did not strain at a gnat to swallow a camel. Why did he refuse to sow grass seed on the lawn in front of his barracks, or join the kitchen force at the mess hall? For two reasons—to cook for the soldiers under military orders, and as a part of the military machine committed him as much to the killing process as if he actually carried a gun to shoot his fellows; and secondly, the whole purpose of the camp officials was to break down the objector's morale, to find a flaw somewhere in his logic, by setting a trap for him to inveigle him into active service. If he could be induced to take one form of service he might be led by easy steps into any other form. The objector knew the purposes of the officers, and drew the line at the only logical place possible, namely to refuse work of any sort connected with the military machine. That this was the situation at least in Camp Funston is shown in the following letter:

November 18, 1917

Hon. Arthur Capper  
Governor of the State of Kansas  
Dear Sir:

Your letter of November 10, accompanied by a petition from various Mennonites, addressed to General Wood, has been referred to this office. I have carefully gone over these petitions and wish to advise you that in every way we are carrying out the War Department's instructions in regard to the Mennonites and Conscientious Objectors. Further there is nothing that we can do in the matter. If these Conscientious Objectors under the care and treatment they receive at this camp can be talked into rendering any kind of work that is connected with the military service by their fellow soldiers it does not appear that their belief can be very solidly grounded.

Very respectfully,

N. C. Shiverick,

Major Ad. Gen., U. S. A.

Unable to appreciate the views of the conscientious objector against war, and failing to convict him of cowardice, many tried to explain him on the basis of low mentality. Accordingly the War Department, as already mentioned, appointed a special psychological board to study this strange phenomenon from a psychological point of view. The investigations were no doubt honestly and intelligently made, but the results were hardly what those responsible for the appointment of the board had expected. The conclusions of the special board were that the conscientious objectors were above the average of all enlisted men in intelligence.

## War Drives

As to participation in the various campaigns for war and relief work there was a diversity of opinion and practise during the war. The leadership at first was quite generally agreed except among the more liberal congre-

gations against any participation. But the pressure from local committees in most localities became so great that in almost every community there was a large number that supported the various campaign for funds. The Old Mennonites, Amish, Defenseless, Reformed Mennonites and the Mennonite Brethren opposed all participation, but most of them under compulsion made some contribution to the various funds and bought bonds. Several attempts were made to escape the purchase of bonds directly by depositing money in local banks for a stipulated number of years, but which it was understood was not to be used for buying bonds, although it might release other money to be thus invested. In several localities scruples against supporting the war with money was satisfied by promising that money contributed would be used for the purchase of food, and not for ammunition and other means of warfare.

The Mennonites in the west as a rule contributed quite freely to Y. M. C. A. and Red Cross funds, but hesitated to buy bonds, although under compulsion many did so. The Middle District and the Eastern District of the General Conference, and the Central Illinois Conference bought quite freely, and contributed quite liberally to all funds.

Besides these funds the Old Mennonites and the Amish, assisted by the Central Illinois Conference and the Defenseless Mennonites, contributed heavily toward reconstruction work in France. Later relief work was also taken up in Armenia. In 1919 when famine and pestilence spread among the Mennonites of South Russia most of the relief work of the various branches of the Mennonites, including the General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren and other American Russian groups, was directed toward the assistance of their afflicted brethren in the land of the Bolsheviks.



In spite of these efforts, however, and in striking contrast to the considerate treatment accorded them by the Federal Government, Mennonites in most communities were harshly criticized and frequently abused by the non-Mennonite population. Throughout central Illinois a number of church buildings were painted yellow by irresponsible hoodlum elements, as was the case also in many other sections of the country. In Kansas several men were tarred and feathered. The most serious attacks were made upon the German speaking Mennonites in Oklahoma. One minister was seized by a mob and strung up a telegraph pole, but rescued by local officials. Two other men were attacked and driven out of their community for preaching the Mennonite doctrine of non-resistance. Two Mennonite church houses were burned down, as was also a barn which was being used as a temporary meeting place. In Ohio one prominent minister was called from a prayer meeting and had his hair shorn because his donation to the Red Cross was not considered large enough by the mob which attacked him. Everywhere men were intimidated and abused by local committees for hesitating to purchase bonds or contribute to the various war funds, although Mennonites as a whole gave a great deal more to general relief work than those who abused them. In South Dakota the Hutterites after having been robbed of forty thousand dollars worth of live stock by an irresponsible hoodlum mob with the connivance of an official Liberty Loan committee were forced to flee to Canada to escape further persecution at the hands of super-patriots.

Comparatively few communities escaped some form of intimidation or abuse from local mobs, or even councils of defense and self-styled vigilance committees. The newspapers, too, both local and metropolitan, throughout the entire country, were most bitter against

the non-resistant churches, and especially the Mennonites, and many were unscrupulous in their attempts to stir up feeling against them. Few of the papers and few of the local communities were in sympathy with the liberal policy the government followed toward the conscientious objectors.

The government authorities were quite lenient, too, toward Mennonite publications and church leaders, who, under the guarantee of religious liberty, were permitted considerable freedom in advising their constituencies against participating in war activities. One editor of a Mennonite paper, however, was fined \$500 for printing an objectionable article. Most of the editors were wise enough in their papers to merely state the position of the church on all war questions, which under the guarantee of religious liberty they had a perfect right to do, but not to urge any opposition to the policies of the government which under the espionage act they could have been prosecuted for. A number of the Old Mennonite ministers who signed the Yellow Creek Conference resolutions advising the Mennonite young men against accepting non-combatant service were interviewed by federal officials, and warned not to interfere too seriously with war measures. Had the war continued much longer several of the church leaders who were most outspoken against participating in the various war work campaigns would perhaps have been placed under certain restrictions for the period of the war.

### **Relief Work**

In the meantime such Mennonites as had scruples against participating in the various war drives, but at the same time were anxious to serve their fellow men during this time of crisis, and desirous as well of convincing the non-Mennonite world that their refusal to take any

part in the destructive processes of war, was not due to any lack of loyalty to their country, nor to any selfish reasons, but rather to an ancient and deep-seated conviction that all war is wrong, sought other ways than through regular military channels to be of help to the civilian victims in the warring countries. They were willing to assume any burdens, or make any sacrifices necessary to restore and preserve human life, but refused to be any part of the killing process.

The Old Mennonites were the first to take official steps in this direction. As early as December, 1917, this branch of the church organized a Mennonite Relief Commission for War Sufferers, which in the course of a few following years collected some \$300,000.00 to be distributed through the Friends Service Committee among the civilian war victims in France. A number of young men, mostly conscientious objectors, volunteered their services for this work, but none were admitted until after the signing of the peace treaty.

Immediately after World War I, however, some fifty young men, mostly of the Old Mennonite persuasion, but several from the other branches as well, joined the Friends Service Committee in reconstruction work in the war-stricken lands of Europe. A little later, too, twenty-six young men and two young women enlisted with the American Committee for Relief in the Near East, for relief work among the refugees in that region. Over \$360,000.00 was collected for this service among the American Mennonites.

The General Conference, too, revived an earlier committee of some years standing, the Emergency Relief Committee, for the purpose of aiding war sufferers wherever they might be found; but they did not enter very extensively at first in the reconstruction work on the western front. Early in 1920 the Mennonite Brethren and

the Krimmer Brethren joined the western contingent of the General Conference in sending clothing and other supplies to their suffering fellow Mennonites in Siberia; but this project hardly got started before it had to be abandoned, because the door to Siberia had been closed by the civil wars in that region. The efforts of these branches of the church were then directed for a few years to relief for the needy people of central Europe, Germany, Austria, and Poland.

By 1920 also the American Mennonites had heard of the suffering and distress of their brethren in South Russia. From this time on relief work among all the branches of the denomination was turned in that direction. As noted in another chapter, on July 27, 1920, a new organization, representing the different branches, was perfected under the name of the *Mennonite Central Committee* (MCC). Cooperating in this effort were the *Emergency Relief Committee* of the General Conference; the *Mennonite Relief Commission for War Sufferers* of the Old Mennonites; and similar committees from the Central Conference, the Mennonite Brethren and the Krimmer Brethren. Other smaller groups also liberally supported the work of this committee, though not always through any subsidiary organizations of their own. But the splendid service rendered by the American Mennonites to their starving and persecuted Russian brethren during this critical period is described elsewhere, and needs no further reference here. All told it is estimated that during the war and the period immediately following, the entire denomination collected and distributed over \$2,500,000.00 among the various war sufferers through all the different relief agencies above mentioned; all outside of any of the official Y. M. C. A., Red Cross or other war drives of the period.

### Profiting by Their Experiences

The conscription act of 1917 found the Mennonites ill-prepared to meet the demands made upon them by the exigencies of war. For over two hundred years, with but few exceptions, they had enjoyed almost complete exemption from military service even in war time; and they had little reason to expect anything else for the future. Respect for religious conscience they thought had been won forever in America. Wars, too, it was generally believed, would be fought by volunteers, as they had been in the past. Their non-resistant doctrines had never been seriously challenged; and therefore had given them little concern. Like the other tenets of their faith, it had been taken for granted, and its practise no more to be challenged. But it was challenged with the results as already noted.

Profiting by their experiences in the late war, many Mennonites were constrained to re-examine and re-appraise these principles in the light of the new demands that likely would be again made on them in the case of another war; to clarify their thought beforehand; and fortify their resolution to remain firm in the faith if the worst should happen. Several of the larger branches of the denomination, especially the General Conference, the Old Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren, and the Central Conference appointed standing peace committees, which by holding peace institutes and by printing peace literature, and through various activities greatly strengthened the peace convictions among their members; and gave them a new realization of the soundness of their faith as a solution for the troubles of a warring world.

Realizing also that the cause would be greatly strengthened by cooperation with other historic peace



churches, the Mennonites joined in numerous peace meetings with the Quakers and Dunkards.

Alongside of these efforts to clarify their own thinking, and to fortify their own convictions on the question of peace, the Mennonites were assiduous in acquainting the general public, and especially the governing authorities with their peace principles and the grounds upon which they refused war service. From time to time at proper intervals, petitions were sent to congressmen and the president commending legislation or executive action which in their minds would promote the peace of the country; or protests against measures that would have the contrary effect, all the time, too, informing the recipients of these petitions of the Mennonite stand on the war question. Noteworthy among the incidents in this campaign of education was a personal interview with President Roosevelt in February, 1937, by a committee composed of members of the three historic peace denominations—Quakers, Dunkards and Mennonites. In the course of the visit the President was presented with a statement of the peace principles held in common by the three churches, supplemented by special documents from each of the groups. The Mennonite representatives were Rev. A. J. Neuenschwander of the General Conference, and C. L. Graber of Goshen College, representing the Old Mennonites.

## WORLD WAR II

At the time of Mussolini's conquests, the Spanish Civil War, Hitler's rise to power, and the consequent international armament race it became increasingly clear that another world struggle was at hand. Being opposed to participation in armed violence the American Mennonites prepared to meet the emergency. The various conferences had experienced leadership and organized

machinery to deal with the approaching crisis. More and more these efforts became centralized and, by delegated action, represented in the Mennonite Central Committee, the agency founded after World War I and embodying in its membership all American Mennonite groups.

### Preliminary Steps

Not only did the Mennonites have more adequate machinery than in previous crises, but they were also doing some positive educational work and restudying of the whole issue of "non-resistance" to make it a more meaningful and positive witness. Through congregations, publications, special peace committees, and educational institutions this program was promoted.

When World War II broke out in September, 1939, the Peace Committee of the Mennonite Central Committee formulated definite plans to meet the situation in case the United States should become involved in the war. On September 16, 1939, the officers of this committee met with representatives of the Church of the Brethren and of the Friends, to outline a plan of action in case of war. This plan proposed that members of the *historical peace churches* should register, indicating their conscientious objection to military service and willingness to render useful service of a non-military character. It was also agreed to see the president and other government officials to propose definite plans of alternative service; this was done January 10, 1940.

In September, 1940, Congress passed the Selective Training and Service Act providing that all persons who "by reason of religious training and belief" were opposed to military service should, "be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction."

On October 5, 1940, the historic peace churches organized what later was known as the National Service

Board for Religious Objectors (NSBRO). The NSBRO became the agency through which the peace churches worked in dealing with Selective Service. The peace churches now presented a plan to Selective Service for setting up Civilian Public Service camps in which the work would be under the direction of government technical men and the social and religious life under the supervision of the peace churches. This plan was accepted by Selective Service and approved in a modified form by the president on December 20, 1940. The peace churches had recommended that the government provide the cost of maintenance and pay the men the approximate wages that drafted men in the army received. This proposal, however, was turned down by the president and it was agreed that the government would "provide work camps, bedding, other equipment, technical equipment for soil conservation and pay the men's transportation costs to the camps while the peace churches agreed to supply subsistence, hospital care, and generally all things necessary for the care and maintenance of the men."

### **Civilian Public Service**

In May, 1941, the first Civilian Public Service (CPS) camps were opened. By the end of the year there were twenty-five camps. Most of them were concerned with soil conservation and forestry service. During 1942, a total of fifty-two additional units were organized, and by the end of the war 151 had been authorized. These units were scattered over thirty-four states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. Some eighteen different kinds of agencies were organized, each performing a different kind of service. Among these services, besides forestry and soil conservation, were experiments in technical fields such as biology, meteorology, and agriculture; community edu-

cation, recreational and health programs; public health work; mental hospital work; "guinea pig" projects; dairy farm work and dairy herd testing, and artificial insemination programs; fire fighting in trained parachute-corps; processing food, etc.

As the war progressed, more and more of the units were assigned to mental hospitals. Of the fifty-one such units, the Mennonites administered twenty-five. Nearly three thousand CPS men engaged in this kind of work. They worked in forty-six of the nation's three hundred and fifty public mental hospitals. Among the results of the mental hospital work of the Mennonites and other peace churches was the establishment of the National Mental Health Foundation and the national shock after World War II of the terrible conditions existing in mental hospitals as this discovery found expression in revealing books, stirring magazine articles, and the book and film: *The Snake Pit*. This interest has already resulted in drastic reforms in our mental institutions. The Mennonites, too, have become interested in establishing mental hospitals.

The Directory of Civilian Public Service of May, 1941, to March, 1947, listing all names and addresses of CPS men gives a total of 11,996. They came not only from the three historic peace churches but also from 226 other religious groups, and 449 were non-affiliated and 709 unclassified as to denomination. There were 107 groups that furnished only one representative each. The fourteen churches which had a hundred or more members in CPS came in this order: Mennonite 4,665; Church of the Brethren, 1,353; Society of Friends, 951; Methodist, 673; Jehovah's Witness, 409; Congregational Christian, 209; Church of Christ, 199; Presbyterian, 192; Roman Catholic, 149; Christadelphian, 127; Lutheran, 108; Evangelical and Reformed, 101. Thus we see that the Men-

monites with their active teaching of non-resistance furnished more than a third of all men in Civilian Public Service.

By far not all Mennonite young men chose to serve in Civilian Public Service. Many served in the army as non-combatants in the medical corps and others entered regular service. Among the most conservative Mennonite groups the young men were almost 100 per cent CO's, while among the more liberal groups who had adjusted themselves more completely to the American environment, the majority took up service in the army. The overall result indicates that about half of all men drafted took up army service while half chose civilian service.

### **Cost and Administration of CPS**

According to Melvin Gingerich in *Service for Peace* (1949), the total contribution of all Mennonite churches to the Civilian Public Service fund from 1941 to 1947 amounted to \$3,386,254 in cash and gifts in kind. With a constituency of approximately 120,000 members, this amounted to about twenty-five dollars per member. This sum is almost half the total spent by the three peace churches in support of CPS. The above total also includes a considerable amount spent for the support of non-peace church men in CPS. The amount needed for the operation of CPS was raised through voluntary offerings from the entire constituency of the MCC by a quota system which at first suggested contributions of fifty cents per member, but with the rising cost of CPS this figure was later set at six dollars per member per year. Unlike the men in alternative service camps in Canada, the CPS men received no pay, but at various times were given a monthly allowance from the MCC amounting to \$1.50-\$5.00.



In line with the original agreement between the peace churches and Selective Service System, the administration of CPS was shared by the government and the churches. The churches supervised the in-camp social, educational and all religious life while the government was responsible for living quarters and supervision of the work program. Induction, discharges, transfers, and all matters of camp discipline remained the responsibility of the Selective Service System under Major General Lewis B. Hershey. To fulfill its responsibility the MCC appointed camp directors for each camp who administered camp life in its religious and social phases. In all larger areas camps were supervised by a regional director who was responsible to the general director at Akron, Pennsylvania, who for the early period of CPS was H. A. Fast, to be succeeded by Albert Gaeddert, who in turn was succeeded by Erwin Goering.

The Mennonite Central Committee also created the office of educational director of CPS which position was filled for most of the CPS period by Elmer Ediger. The purpose of an educational program was, broadly speaking, to build morale among the men, to supply outlets for various talents and interests, to secure a better understanding of the principle of non-resistance, and to inculcate an appreciation of the Mennonite heritage in its various aspects. To help achieve these aims the MCC published a series of six booklets under the general title, *Mennonites and their Heritage*. The educational division at Akron arranged for educational programs in all camps directly supervised by a camp educational director, in which many outside people: college instructors, ministers, professional men, and government technical men participated as lecturers and camp visitors. The contact with home communities was maintained by visiting ministers and relatives.

Even though the actual work performed by men assigned to "work of national importance" did not always seem important to them, the educational results for the men coming from all parts of the United States and from all Mennonite and many other religious groups were of positive value in challenging them to become more conscious of their heritage and their peace contribution. The churches at home, challenged to cooperate and present a united witness, benefitted from the spiritual impact the CPS program made upon them. To quote from the statement of policy on CPS approved by the Mennonite Central Committee meeting, September 16, 1943:

They (Mennonites) desire to transform the compulsion of CPS into the free service of a Christian who seeks to establish the Kingdom of God among men by the preaching of the Gospel and the practice of Christian discipleship.

### **"In the Name of Christ"**

The CPS program of the Mennonite churches of the United States does not present a complete picture of their activities during and after World War II. The following table shows some figures of relief expenditures, gifts in kind dispensed, and the number of relief workers for three representative years.

	1946	1947	1948
Total Relief Expenditures (US and Canada)	\$898,500.40	\$936,786.33	\$868,604.05
Gifts in Kind Dispensed	\$1,948,285.02	\$2,136,153.59	\$1,777,585.03
Workers on the Field	237	288	217

The rehabilitation program of some ten thousand Mennonite refugees is not included in these expenditures. It is true, the International Refugee Organization contributed to this cost, but the major contributions to this program came from the Mennonites in Canada and the United States.

The number of relief workers on the foreign field rose

to a peak of 317 in July, 1947, so that by the end of 1948 some 600 men and women had been out to serve "in the name of Christ." Most of them went for a two-year period. Material compensation was: maintenance plus \$10 per month. Among these workers were more than a hundred young men who had already served from one to four years in Civilian Public Service. While yet in CPS the young men, even though they had no income, began to contribute financially for the relief program and started to prepare themselves for this task. Many of them would have preferred to do relief work in war devastated areas rather than spend their time in CPS camps. One unit actually proceeded as far as Capetown, South Africa, but had to return because Congress did not approve of conscientious objectors doing relief work.

Clothing, food, and gifts in kind are being collected in the Mennonite Central Committee collection centers and warehouses such as, Silver Springs and Ephrata, Pennsylvania; North Newton, Kansas; Reedley, California; Kitchener, Ontario; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. Between December, 1946, and November 30, 1947, some 5,073 tons of food, clothing, soap and other commodities were collected having a value of \$1,878,000. Twenty-seven car loads of food were attached to the Friendship train. Furthermore, tools, garden seeds, religious literature, Christmas bundles, school bags, toys, and implements have been shipped to Europe and to the Mennonite settlements in Paraguay. Germany has received the major portion of the MCC relief contributions.

Besides the testimony which Mennonites gave through Civilian Public Service and relief and rehabilitation abroad they made other efforts at presenting a consistent peace witness in time of war and peace. They were confronted with the challenge of buying war bonds to finance the war. For many, a Christian solution of

this problem presented itself when the government offered "civilian" bonds, the proceeds of which were designated for civilian operations of the government. Under the Canadian plan the proceeds of civilian bonds were used for the relief of war sufferers. Another area in which Mennonites tried to remain sensitive and give a positive witness was that of working in munitions factories and in general doing "defense work." It was generally felt that participation in such work was inconsistent and contrary to the faith of non-resistant Christians. A new field of activity for Mennonites during and since World War II is that of race relations. Beginning as CPS public health units in Florida and Mississippi, work with colored people has continued in these states through voluntary service units. In these units all people, regardless of race, are given the benefit of health and recreational services, as well as spiritual fellowship.

### **Post-War Services**

Wars end, but the need for Christian service never does. The awakened sensitiveness to the spiritual and economic needs of the world cannot find rest, but must continue to serve wherever a need arises. Through the channels of the Mennonite Central Committee, the American Mennonites continue their service in the Near and Far East and in connection with emergencies like the one in Hungary. Voluntary Service provides opportunity for young people to serve at home and abroad for longer or for shorter terms. The 1-W program gives young men of military age an opportunity to do work similar to that which the Civilian Public Service provided. Many young men of military age choose to serve in Pax units abroad. Disaster units, regularly organized or spontaneously called to serve, help in cases of emergencies arising from floods, tornadoes, fires, etc.

A direct result of Civilian Public Service during World War II was the establishment of a number of mental hospitals. During the war, many of the young men served in mental hospitals. The need for a service in this field on a consecrated Christian basis led to the establishment of Brook Lane Farm, Maryland, 1949; Kings View Homes, Reedley, California, 1951; Philhaven, Lancaster, Pennsylvania, 1952; and Prairie View Hospital, Newton, Kansas, 1954. In addition to this, many 1-W men continue to serve in hospitals throughout the country. The Christian witness and service are never ended; they must go on.



Symbol of Voluntary Service



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# INDEX

This index includes the major countries, places, persons, institutions, concepts, and events dealing with the Mennonites from the beginning to the present as they are treated in this book. In the case of early Dutch leaders the persons are usually listed under the first name; for example, Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, etc. are found under *Menno*, *Dirk*, etc. and not Simons, Philips, etc. Information concerning Mennonite family histories can be found under *Names*.

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